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“Female Victimization in *Gone Girl* and *Sharp Objects* by Gillian Flynn”

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Abstract

This thesis examines the theme of women's victimization in Gillian Flynn's novels *Gone Girl* and *Sharp Objects* through an analysis of the two novels' female characters. About their personality disorders as well as pressure from society, this study, therefore, seeks to shed light on the author's criticism of gender politics prevailing today. This is going to involve a detailed examination of both texts to identify how these women are contained by negative power, manipulation, and violence, which turns them into either victims or perpetrators. The media's contribution to gender discrimination besides character development will also be discussed in this paper. Throughout, those behind these females' suffering will be considered through studies on Betty Friedan and Karen Horney who are among the leading feminists in history. Here is where modern literature fits in that complex landscape by reflecting upon challenging stereotypes associated with sexuality and/or gender roles thus leading to a level playing field for its readership; it has ended up getting involved in major crises affecting the human race concerning women and their place within society (from which they have been subjected). Consequently, this paper discusses why Flynn depicts her female characters as victims trapped by their societies, families, or places of residence in fiction as well as how fiction can be used as a tool for resistance and enlightenment outside print itself.

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1. Introduction

1.1. History of Waves of Feminism and Emergence of Gillian Flynn as a Feminist Author

“Waves of feminism” is a term that has been used to describe different points in human history that have been vibrant and transformative. In each case, a wave of feminism was seen as an era of struggling against discrimination based on sex and gender in various forms. The journey began with the first wave of feminism in the 19th century. This wave is associated with the suffrage movement, where women were granted the right to vote by the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution passed in 1920. They also sought legal reforms that would allow women to have equal rights with men. Susan B Anthony was one of those who were at the forefront of this first wave of feminism. Her contribution was very important because it led to ratification of the nineteenth amendment to the United States Constitution in 1920, which finally gave women voting rights. 1869 saw her establish the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), which condemned the lack of suffrage for women. She published a weekly newspaper called *The Revolution* concentrating on female issues. In addition, later she wrote “*The History of Women Suffrage*” together with other activists and authors, a six-volume set detailing achievements during this period. Another figure who stood way ahead of her time is Mary Wollstonecraft. By writing the book *Vindication of the Rights of Women*¹ she made a significant contribution to feminist writing and criticism. In this book, she argues about women’s rights to education and their identity as something beyond what they do at home. In Chapter 12 of her book, she says:

“Were boys and girls permitted to pursue the same studies together, those graceful de-
cencies might early be inculcated which produce modesty, without those sexual distinctions
that taint the mind.”

Her writing was also affected by the Enlightenment period which was an era that doubted traditional authority and promoted thinking based on rationality including pondering over women’s places in the society. Secondly, Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* which sparked second-wave feminism in 1963 is discussed later in this chapter and others, and this extended to encompass many areas such as sexuality, jobs, reproductive rights, and social inequities. It drew its inspiration from the post-World War II socio-political issues. This wave saw many changes such as the Equal Pay Act in 1963, Title IX in 1972,

¹ Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Edited by Deidre Shauna Lynch, W.W. Norton & Company, 2009.

and the legalization of abortion with *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Gloria Steinem is another important figure of this wave. Her undercover report in 1963 called *A Bunny's Tale* brought her fame and introduced her to people as a journalist with a feminist side. In 1972 she co-founded “Ms. Magazine”, which was the first national magazine about feminism. In her book *My Life on the road*,² she says³:

The third wave, which appeared in the 90s, involved activists who critiqued second-wave for only focusing on middle-class white women. They thus stressed diversity, intersectionality, and equality among all genders. Moreover, this one was pro-body positivity. Among the most influential people of this era is Judith Butler—a philosopher as well as a gender theorist whose works had a far-reaching impact on feminism, queer theory, and gender roles. She first propounded her concept of gender performativity through *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* published in 1990. Herein she asserts that gender is not an essence, but an act done by someone, not who they are. It is constituted by acts, gestures, and performances that society has deemed them to do, rather than how they like to act. It is through society pressures that they act the way they do, and it is not related to their sex. In this book she claims⁴:

The other important character of this time is Kimberle Crenshaw, the American civil rights advocate and a leading scholar of critical race theory who has also introduced the term intersectionality. She introduced the term in her article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics”⁵. In this article, she states that:

“Discriminations against a white female are thus the standard sex discrimination claim; claims that diverge from this standard appear to present some hybrid claim. More significantly, because black women’s claims are regarded as hybrid, they sometimes cannot

² Steinem, Gloria. *My Life on the Road*, Random House, 2015.

³ I could see that not speaking up made my mother feel worse. This was my first hint of the truism that depression is anger turned inward; thus, women are twice as likely to be depressed. My mother paid a high price for caring too much yet being able to do so little about it. In this way she led me toward an activist place where she herself could never go. (*My Life on the Road, Chap.5, p. 135*)

⁴ The masculine/feminine binary constitutes not only the exclusive framework in which that specificity can be recognized, but in every other way, the specificity of the feminine is once again fully decontextualized and separated off analytically and politically from the constitution of class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of power relations that both constitutes identity and make the singular notion of identity a misnomer. (*Gender Trouble, Chap.1, P.42*)

⁵ Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.”, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989.

represent those who may have pure claims of sex discrimination.”

In her conclusion she claims that while a rule or policy may impact both white and black women, it will disproportionately affect black ones, creating a distinction because of their skin color. Because of this, these prominent figures tried to rise more against discrimination, especially in issues such as gender, race, class, etc. Wave number four began around 2010, when technology started to progress, particularly through social media, global movements, and discussions. Using social apps like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook and posts, tweets, and hashtags, this wave gave awareness to people worldwide about feminism and the activities that were done before in the last three waves. The focus was on sexual harassment with significant movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp. It also advocates the rights of LGBTQ+ rights, and equality between races alongside gender equality. The influential figures of this wave are Tarana Burke, founder of the hashtag “Me Too” on social media, and Emma Watson, actress and feminist activist, who launched the HeforShe campaign in 2014 encouraging men to support feminist activities. With focusing on intersectionality, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi became the co-founders of the Black Lives Matter movement, addressed the issue of racism against women are significant to mention. These proliferations have unbelievably inspired women not only in the West but also in the entire world to engage more in discourses about their rights and the societal expectations of them. Feminist activists in the current times or future are expected to emphasize even more on societal expectations and women's roles in politics with the help of the media.

Gillian Flynn, the American contemporary novelist, emerged as a writer in 2006. She is an important figure in contemporary feminist literature. Her novels are mostly psychological thrillers with women being the protagonists who are also vulnerable and victimized in their families, marriages, or societies. Her works are delved into the deep psychological analysis of femininity and societal expectations of women. They have also challenged the traditional thinking of society and even those kinds of literature, regarding women as human beings always beside their men and on the margins. Flynn regards women in these patriarchal societies not only as victims but also as complex protagonists or antagonists with personality disorders. Her female characters are deeply complex, which is tactile in reading. Furthermore, the personality of her female characters is usually contradictory and difficult to analyze, as exemplified by Amy Dunne in *Gone Girl*, who goes back and forth between being in the role of a victimized housewife who has sacrificed everything and been given nothing in return and the cruelest, manipulative wife. This multifaceted portrayal of

women is what differentiates her novels from other novels about female victimization since her novels portray both sides of victimized women in a patriarchal society. Flynn presents multiple ways of victimization and violence in her works, like physical violence, psychological manipulation, media interference, or societal pressures. She combines violation and victimization with gender and shows how society's discrimination can lead to such issues. In her 2018 interview with *the New York Times*, she said:

“I do think the world can be divided into the people who like to look under the rock and the people who don't want to look under the rock, I've always said, since birth, Let's look under the rock.”

Her purpose is to reflect reality and the reality is dark in her opinion; she wanted her audience to look “under the rock” just like she does. In *Gone Girl* and other novels, she examines the role of media in women's lives; the issue that is the concern of contemporary feminist activists as well. She sees social media as tools for both victimization and liberation, depending on which side is used by the people and society. Her insight regarding her female characters offers insights into the interconnection between her novels and psychoanalysis. She says: “I've grown quite weary of the spunky heroines, brave rape victims, soul-searching fashionistas, which stuck so many books. I particularly mourn the lack of female villains; good, potent female villains.” This is what she said in her 2013 interview with “The Guardian” and shows her intention to explore her female characters' identity and victimization beyond conventional narratives involving psychoanalysis. In general, the analysis of female victimization in literature is important today because literature reflects social realities. Through the critical examination of contemporary literature, feminists can delve deeper into this issue of victimization and, therefore eliminate approaches to address this issue and focus on it. Literature has the potential to attract its audience and invite them to reconsider their thinking, particularly concerning such critical matters.

1.2. Psychoanalysis and Its Significant Role in Understanding Female Victimization

Psychoanalysis started with Sigmund Freud in the 20th century. From then onwards, it has been a significant theoretical paradigm for understanding gender roles and power dynamics. The central theory of Sigmund Freud's is “the Unconscious Mind”. According to this theory, Sigmund Freud says that our behaviors, traumas, and experiences are significantly connected to the unconscious mind, a part that humans are unaware of its existence. He introduces three parts of the human mind: the conscious mind, the preconscious mind, and the un-

conscious mind. The conscious part is responsible for the behaviors and thoughts that the individual is aware of, the preconscious mind includes thoughts and emotions that are not directly available but are saved and retrieved in times of need and the unconscious is involved in the memories, thoughts, and wishes that have been automatically repressed and therefore remained unavailable to the other parts. (Freud, S. 1915. *The Unconscious*. PP 159-204).

Sigmund Freud stated that the unconscious mind is in conflict with the conscious mind because these traumas, experiences, and wishes that have been repressed will gradually affect conscious behaviors and thoughts in different situations like dreams or neuroses. (Freud, S. 1900. *Interpretation of Dreams*. PP 4-5) He called these repressed thoughts the defense mechanism of the body for protecting the individual from overthinking because if they were meant to exist in the human conscious mind, they would result in anxiety and mental disorders to the extent that cause paralysis of the mind or damaging reactions of the body. (Freud, S. 1915. *Repressions*. PP 141-158). Freud's theory of repression can be applied to understand Camille Preaker's behavior in *Sharp Objects*. Her destructive behaviors, such as self-harm and alcohol use, are manifestations of repressing her traumas which she cannot face. Her investigation as a journalist in her hometown will mark a return to her past traumas and bad experiences that she constantly tries to repress. Her mother's aggressiveness and emotionlessness towards her and her sister Marian as kids, as well as her mother's serious mental disease which is Munchausen Syndrome by proxy, can be analyzed through Freud's theories to understand how these repressed desires within the family result in a cycle of trauma and victimization. These will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Freud has some important theories that are related to psychosexual development such as the Oedipus complex and penis-envy which shaped the early 20th-century society on how they regarded gender and sexuality. He found a correlation between the Oedipus-complex stage of growth and gender identity; however, these ideas were later criticized by feminist psychoanalysts like Karen Horney for being male-centered towards human growth. Modern psychoanalysts today usually focus on ways in which these unconscious prejudices and societal expectations impact the issue of gender discrimination. Through their research process, some of them have confronted Freud's theories, the reason mostly that they think his theories are related to the old times and male-centered. Recent scholars have introduced intersectionality, LGBTQ rights, and non-binary identities which were not parts of the psychoanalytic theories until the emergence of these feminist psychoanalysts. These perspectives have put psychoanalysis into a path of progress as a field of study that also talks about other genders and moves beyond traditional gender

roles. Today's psychoanalysis is on the way to desire equality for everyone regardless of their gender.

1.3. Betty Friedan and Her Influence on Feminist Psychoanalysis

Betty Friedan is considered a well-known feminist author and theorist. Her influential book *Feminine Mystique* in 1963, challenged society and began a wave of feminism in America. Friedan grew up in a time in which women's rights were considered trivial, and women's roles were limited to their domestic roles giving birth and raising children. She discusses that a woman's responsibilities cannot be limited to a wife and a mother. She puts it into practice by conducting interviews with many American women asking whether they were satisfied with this situation or not, and many of her cases declared that they have lost their identities as individuals and they need their identities back. She states that:

“These mothers have themselves become more infantile, and because they are forced to seek more and more gratification through the child, they are incapable of finally separating themselves from the child. Thus, it is the child who supports life in the mother in that symbiotic relationship, and the child is virtually destroyed in the process.” (*Feminine Mystique*, p.310)

Then she introduced a new concept in feminism called “The problem that has no name”, which shows this void woman felt in their lives but did not exactly know where it came from. She believed it was because they had lots of unfulfilled wishes, and this is a result of being confined to roles as mothers and wives. She then tried to represent that societal expectations will hurt women's mental health. The majority of women with whom she met suffered from different psychological disorders like depression, anxiety, and so on. In her book, she says:

“The chronic fatigue of many housewives brought on by the repetition of their jobs, the monotony of their settings, the isolation and the lack of stimulation.” (*Feminine Mystique*, p.271)

This psychological fact changed the thought in society that women were naturally born for these roles, and they were satisfied with them. By directly interviewing women in America, Friedan changed their lives in the *Feminine Mystique*. She concluded that women need equal rights as men in society for education and jobs because they are capable of doing the same tasks. Then women from other parts of the world started to question their identities and

ask for more. With the publication of her work, many regulations started to reform and shape in America and other countries. It also paved the way for more research on female identity and gender equality. In *Gone Girl*, Amy's character can be regarded as a woman with a problem that has no name. Amy cannot accept to be a housewife as her neighbors and the women around her in the small town of Missouri have accepted to be. She reacted to these traditional thoughts and at times she finds herself so alone because it is only her fighting against this in Missouri. In New York at that time women started to be independent and that is where she came from. She also was educated and independent before moving to the small town with her husband. The central part of Friedan's critique as a theorist was her disagreement with Sigmund Freud and his male-oriented theories. She believed that Freud's theories regard women as inherently inferior to men; especially in his penis-envy theory. She rejected this concept in her book and argued that women's dissatisfaction stems from societal expectations and has nothing to do with their sex. She says in her book:⁶

She describes Freud as a scholar who has visited many human disorders by his patients, but also "a prisoner of his own culture". She says that:

"Much of what Freud believed to be biological, instinctual, and changeless, has been shown by modern research to be a result of specific cultural causes. Much of what Freud describes as characteristic of universal human nature was merely characteristic of certain middle-class European men and women at the end of the nineteenth century." (*Feminine Mystique*, P. 128)

In general, she emphasized that the whole Freudian thought reflects the determinism in the Victorian era which is not reliable in the modern world. She says that the "anal" and "oral" stages which were believed by Freud to be a part of the sexual development of the child are now regarded as a natural human growth process. Therefore, modern scholars have started to reevaluate Freud's theories based on their social needs in the world with a cultural understanding. His theories about femininity, masculinity, and sexual development are seen as

outdated according to modern scholars who recognize a broader category of genders and

⁶ The feminine mystique derives its powers from Freudian thought; for it was an idea born from Freud, which led women, and those who studied them, to misinterpret their mother's frustrations, and their father's and brother's and husband's resentments and inadequacies and their own emotions and possible choices in life. It is a Freudian idea, hardened into apparent fact, that has trapped so many American women today. (*Feminine Mystique*, p. 126)

are looking for equality for all. Judith Butler in her *Gender Trouble*⁷ (1990) confronts Freud's notion of identity as a fixed concept and believes that gender identity is more fluid than what he thought. She said:

“Gender is not a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time, an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.” (*Gender Trouble*, p.134)

Another scholar confronting Freud is Beverly Greene, a professor in the Department of Psychology at St. John's University. She believes that the racial and cultural contexts need to be regarded in gender identity and psychological theories, Freud's works lack this dimension and therefore are required to be reevaluated. In her *Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Among Lesbians and Gay Men*⁸ (1997), she states:

“It is critical that psychological theories and practices reflect the diversity of human experience, recognizing that the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation profoundly shape individual identities and experiences.”

Although Freudian theories have been requested by many scholars to be reevaluated, a point that needs to be mentioned is not to forget him as a pioneer in the field of psychoanalysis and human development. Erik Kandel, a Nobel prize winner neuroscientist, in his *Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and the New Biology of Mind*⁹ (2005) says:

“The dialogue between psychoanalysis and neuroscience is crucial for enriching our understanding of the mind. Freud's pioneering insights into the unconscious have opened avenues for exploration that, with the advances in neuroscience, can now be studied from a biological standpoint.”

1.4. Karen Horney and Her Impacts on Feminist Psychoanalysis

Karen Horney, a pioneer in feminist psychoanalysis, focuses on the impacts of society and culture on women's mental health and life. The experiences she had when she was young were instrumental in forming her perspectives on human behavior and the field of psychoanalysis. Captivated by Freud's theories and case studies, she decided to continue her education at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute. There she got to know many influential figures such as Karl Abraham and Hanns Sachs,

⁷ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.

⁸ Greene, Beverly, editor. *Ethnic and Cultural Diversity Among Lesbians and Gay Men*. SAGE Publications, 1997.

⁹ Kandel, Eric R. *Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and the New Biology of Mind*. American Psychiatric Publishing, 2005.

who had a profound influence on her thinking and development. Her methodology, called cultural psychology, persuaded the other psychoanalysts to acknowledge the importance of culture and society in psychological disorders. She believed that traditional gender roles and patriarchal societies will lead women to feel inferior to men, which can also lead to neurotic behavior. In her book *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, she argues that the deepest neurotic behaviors such as extreme self-criticism or the need for approval from others are results of the desire to conform to societal expectations. One of the key concepts of this book is the “Idealized self”. She believed that this idealized self will be created by individuals according to society’s standards; meaning the self who one wishes to be, while is not. Horney states that:

“This idealized self is usually in conflict with the actual self, which encompasses an individual’s true thoughts, feelings and desires.” (*The Neurotic Personality of our time, p.170*)

She claimed that the idealized self is not healthy but one that is created as a defense mechanism to be accorded with societal and cultural expectations. These expectations and pressures are usually more on women than men in a patriarchal society. Horney’s theory about the struggle between the real self and the idealized self can be applied to Amy Dunne’s character in *Gone Girl* whose actions and manipulations can be seen as her way of coping with the disparity between the real and the idealized self. Amy’s idealized version which is created by her parents in the “Amazing Amy” books, imposes great pressure on her to compete with that version and this leads to her neurotic, manipulative, or even aggressive behavior at times. One of Horney’s other fundamental key theories is called “basic anxiety”; she defines it as a feeling of helplessness and insecurity that stems from the early childhood years because of feelings such as not being loved or supported by the child’s caregivers. In later years, this child will show defense mechanisms to protect her from her overanxiety. Three main defense mechanisms she introduced are: moving towards others which includes constant seeking of affection and approval from others, including those who are trying all the time to please everyone and conform to almost all society’s expectations which make them dependent a lot on the others, the second one is moving against others involving the desire to dominate, control, and show power over everyone which will make these individuals mostly aggressive and manipulative to meet their own needs and desires; they are also competitive and want themselves superior all the time and at all costs, and lastly moving away from others defined as the withdrawal from social interactions and avoiding emotional relationships, they usually isolate themselves and engage in solitary

hobbies and works; these people detach themselves from the society to protect themselves from potential hurt from others. (*Our Inner Conflicts: a constructive theory of neurosis*¹⁰. Chapter 4, p.234) K. Horney's concept of basic anxiety can be a way to understand Camille Preaker's personality in *Sharp Objects*. The psychological issues she suffers from and the relationship she has with her mother and half-sister all represent how neurotic she was raised by her family because of emotional neglect by her mother. The traumatic loss of her beloved sister, Marian, also affected her anxiety and neurosis a lot. These experiences all resulted in Camille feeling extremely insecure and unworthy, which are signs of basic anxiety as Horney stated. Her return to her hometown and facing the society that never accepted her as she was, will worsen these feelings of depression and alienation in her. Her coping mechanism, self-harm, can be seen as a response to this great anxiety. The novel explores how her basic anxiety affects her ability to form healthy relationships with people and her family and the identity crisis she is dealing with due to the expectations that society and her mother have for her all the time. These will further be discussed in the other chapters. During the period when K. Horney emerged, first-wave feminism started to begin in the West. Her theories raised the desires of what feminists needed to achieve in this wave and would later influence the second wave of feminism. Her theories redirected the psychoanalytic theories to be more on gender roles, societal expectations, and cultural differences which put pressure on women.

1.5. Literature Review

History became an important part of literature in the 20th and 21st centuries when Feminism started to emerge in the world and emphasized the importance of gender equality, the challenges, and female victimization that women experience only because of biological differences in various forms whether in society or their families. These have been also reflected in literature, in which often women are marginalized by men, alienated, and desperate in their lives. However, in these stories some women managed to overcome all these unfair situations, thriving, and underscoring the reality that victimization is in various forms. This thesis is inspired by a range of these novels and existing scholarly research on the subject. This literature review gathered information regarding female victimization in literary works that were influenced by society and culture. Despite the rich analysis provided about the topic, there is a gap in exploring intersectionality and psychological disorders still in the novels that

¹⁰ Horney, Karen. *Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1945.

have been read. This thesis will put more emphasis on a deeper understanding surrounding female psychology and gender identity in female victimization and for this purpose will be addressing these issues in both society and literature.

***Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy:**

Victimization is the most important theme in this novel, a notable example from the story is Tess's encounter with Alec d'Urberville, she is raped and subsequently faces societal ostracization. However, the focus is on the culture of victim-blaming in this novel. Thomas Hardy critiques the societal norms of the time in the Victorian era, which placed the onus on women and viewed them as inferior. When Tess thinks about the situation she had, she says:

“Why didn't you tell me there was danger? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to guard against because they read novels that tell them of these tricks...”

Tess, the protagonist feels disappointed by the whole society for failing to protect its women, and instead preferring to leave them vulnerable to men. She also mentions how women are being taught ways to cope with victimization.

***The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker:**

In this novel, the protagonist, Celie, has a traumatic life full of abuse and victimization. She was abused by her stepfather when she was just a teenager. Her stepfather even impregnated her, and she gave birth to two children whom he took away from her. Celie's story and her resilience are a symbol of many women's tragic lives, especially the African American women who were the main point in Walker's novel. In the novel, Celie is talking to God saying:

“He beat me today, cause he say I winked at a boy in church. I may have got something in my eye, but I didn't wink. I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them.”

This quote highlights not only the physical violence she endures but also the constant control over what she does as a woman. Also the traditional way of thinking that views men as a danger to women is highlighted here.

***The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood:**

This can be regarded as one of the most famous examples in contemporary literature regarding the issue of female victimization. The *Handmaid's Tale* is set in a dystopian future. Women are only their reproductive function and have no individuality. The society is repre-

sented in this novel as the Gileadean Regime, which is abusing and victimizing women under the name of God and religion. An obvious example can be the Ceremony in which the maid is ordered to have sexual intercourse with her commander, usually in the presence of his wife. This shows the complete control over women's bodies and actions and their decision to give birth to a child or not.

***The Mad Woman in the Attic* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar:**

This is a foundational text with a focus on women writers and the hardships they go through pursuing their careers as authors in patriarchal societies. They define "mad-woman" as the creativity in women's minds and being a rebel against their societies. It delves into how female writers have both conformed to and subverted the expectations of society and culture through their writings. For example, they use the character Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* as the madwoman who is in the attic in literal terms. She symbolized the confinement of creative women in a patriarchal world. They discuss that 19th-century female writers could not protest in their societies, so they showed their disagreement with patriarchy in their works using their creativity.

"Women, Culture, and their Society" edited by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere:

It is a seminal collection which is about women's role in culture and the impact of society on their lives. The essays talk about female victimization in various forms, each essay contributes to an understanding of how society and culture victimize women, offering critical sights on gender inequality and traditional thoughts.

***Feminist Theory and Literary Practice* by Deborah L. Madsen:**

In this book there is an intersection between feminism and literature, analyzing that the literary texts can also properly discuss gender discrimination. She explores how literature can sustain gender stereotypes while also focusing on how feminist critics are uncovering and challenging these literary works. She discussed the critical role of the literature in shaping feminist thought and the ongoing struggles regarding female victimization.

2. Female Victimization in *Gone Girl*: A Horneyan and Friedanian Analysis

2.1. Introduction to the Novel

Gone Girl is one of the most revolutionary novels of Gillian Flynn, published in 2012. The plot shows the complexity of marriage and is considered a contemporary literary work dealing with feminism. This main focus is on the role of media and societal expectations in the lives of women. The setting is North Carthage, Missouri, the story starts with the mysterious disappearance of Amy Elliott Dunne gradually attracts the public's attention, the media, and the intervention of the law that start to suspect her husband, Nick, as the number one guilty individual in his wife's disappearance and the destruction of their marriage; this will have a huge impact on her husband's life and mental health. The novel's narrative structure intricately alternates between Amy and Nick's viewpoint on their marriage until the reader realizes that both narrators are unreliable. The readers start to gather more information on their marital relationship and their mental status. The novel addresses female victimization, the pressure of societal expectations on women, their treatment within intimate partnerships, and the role of media in reinforcing traditional gender norms. The narrative depicts how women are pressured to hide their true identities from the real world to be accepted by men and other women in their patriarchal societies and how judgemental these societies can be which harms women to the greatest extent. It also discusses how women in today's world have to fight the media and social platforms in order to own individuality and have privacy in their lives. Amy Dunne, the protagonist, is a type of character that can show the theme of female victimization, its articulation and exploration for the readers. She is a multifaceted complex character that can be both the victim and the perpetrator. The novel starts with Nick's monologue describing his wife, the complexity of her character, thoughts, and mind is presented to the reader. Nick's early description of Amy focuses on his wife's "head", symbolizing the intricate character she owns. He says:

"When I think of my wife, I always think of her head. The shape of it, to begin with. The very first time I saw her, it was the back of it I saw, and there was something lovely about it, the angles of it. Like a shiny, hard corn kernel or a riverbed fossil. She had what the Victorians would call a *finely shaped head*. You could imagine the skull quite easily." (Flynn,14)¹¹

¹¹ Flynn, Gillian. Crown Publishing Group, 2012, p.14.

At first, Amy is portrayed as a quintessential victim, being under so much pressure from her parents' expectations from a young age and further marginalized in her marriage by her husband. However, as the narrative progresses, there is a turning point that leads to the unveiling of Amy's manipulative character. She has faked her disappearance, framed her husband, and showed him to the public through her fake diary entries as a person who is not only against her but also against her family and everything and everyone related to her. Her role is pivotal in dissecting the nuances of female victimization. She is modelled as the "missing white woman" who might be also pregnant, and all these make her a woman with societal and marital difficulties of victimhood. Amy is ironically the societal construct of the ideal woman, epitomized in her definition of the "Cool Girl", a persona who sacrifices the real self to align with societal expectations of defined femininity. She defines these women as follows:¹²

Amy, like any other woman who is aware of her rights, opposes the fact that women should be dictated to what to do in society in order to be loved by men and to be an archetype of an ideal woman. She criticizes this image and presents herself as a woman who is not conforming to these definitions and wants to have her own identity regardless of her gender and what society wants her to become. Furthermore, it unveils her consciousness about traditional gender roles and the patriarchal framework in which society is formed. She is constantly criticizing gender roles and the way they are defined by her society, she also gives comments on the dynamics of power and gender within society. The cool girl archetype is a character who is expected to be engaged in masculine activities while simultaneously owning the societal standards of beauty and femininity. This character should suppress her desires to better align with those of men. A woman's sense of self is defined according to her relationships with men, and her identity must be shaped according to her partner's expectations of her. Thus, the autonomous identity within a patriarchal society is discouraged, and women are expected to define themselves through their relationships and their ability to

¹² Men always say that as the defining compliment, don't they? *She's a cool girl*. Being a cool girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping, who plays video games, drinks cheap beer, loves threesome and anal sex, and jams hot dogs and hamburgers into her mouth like she's hosting the world's biggest culinary gang bang while somehow maintaining a size 2, because cool girls are above all hot. Hot and understanding. Cool Girls never get angry; they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let their men do whatever they want. *Go ahead, shit on me, I don't mind, I'm the Cool Girl*. (Flynn, 240)

satisfy men's desires. This is a form of female victimization in which the authentic self is sacrificed in favour of becoming someone else that is more attractive and sexually accepted by men. Amy also confesses that she is concerned that the cool girl may be more desirable to her husband than her authentic self. This leads her to occasionally play the role of cool girl, driven by the belief that this way both the society and her husband will be more attracted to her, neglecting her desires and wishes. This portrayal of a cool girl aligns with Betty Friedan's definition of "feminine mystique", a concept that will be discussed later in the chapter.

2.2. Overview of Female Victimization in *Gone Girl*

The theme of female victimization is not explored only in Amy's characters, but also in other female characters of the novel. One example of victimization can be seen in Nick's sister, Margo, given the nickname "Go". Margo is engaged in the masculinization of her identity. Avoiding using her full feminine name, working at a bar, and being the caregiver in her relationship with her family members signify the tendency of society to reflect the nuanced ways in which women navigate identity within a gendered social framework. Margo's existence in the novel further illuminates the complex dynamics of gender expectations and the types of victimization experienced by women, who often find themselves compelled to either embody or reject certain gendered identities in response to societal pressures they endure. Margo co-owns a bar with Nick. Her experience with victimization is more societal, stemming from her intimate relationship with her brother who now is the number one suspect in a murder case. As his sister, she is subjected to judgment from both the public and the media, a problem that disregards her individuality and autonomy. The portrayal of Nick within the media has a profound effect on her professional life as a colleague of her brother as well. Margo's experience of manipulation goes beyond the direct consequences of Amy's actions and includes the indirect effects of Nick's multiple infidelities in telling her the truth about his life. She was raised in a traditional family environment, characterized by gender biases and a father who was a misogynist who complicated her state of victimization. To gain attention from her father, Margo found herself compelled to adopt the persona of a tomboy. Thus, her identity and perceived social values became entwined with her ability to align with these gender expectations, highlighting the impact of familial and societal norms on her identity formation. The only company she has is her brother since she does not fit into both categories of females and males. Nick is the

closest person to her and in the novel, he confesses that the only woman he can deeply trust is her. In the story, Nick says:

“I doubt my sister will ever marry: if she’s sad, or upset or angry, she needs to be alone. She fears a man dismissing her womanly tears.” (Flynn, 73)

The type of family Margo has had, instilled in her a misunderstanding that her emotional expressions will be marginalized by every man because of the attitude her father showed toward her emotions. This realization is something common among women living in a patriarchal society or family in which their emotions are always regarded as illogical or irrational. Margo is reluctant to marry or have a family because of the traumas she experienced in her parent’s marriage as a child. She presents a defence mechanism in every behaviour she witnesses which reminds her of her father’s. This defensive act has a lasting impact on early familial interactions and highlights intricate ways in which patriarchal norms cover to shape women’s perspectives on intimacy and trust. In “Three Essays on Theory of Sexuality”¹³, Sigmund Freud explains the complex interplay of psychosexual development during adolescence. He brought up how these early stages of development, dominated by fantasies and infantile tendencies, serve as a precursor to a significant psychosocial milestone. The emotional detachment is the most influential one. This detachment will affect the individual’s maturation of the sexual identity which will later lead to having romantic relationships. He says:

“At every stage in the course of development through which all human beings ought by rights to pass, a certain number are held back; so there are some who have never got over their parents’ authority and have withdrawn their affection from them either very incompletely or not at all. They are mostly girls, who, to the delight of their parents, have persisted in all their childish love far beyond puberty.” (Freud, 118)

Being raised with a misogynist father, Margo was not able to build a healthy relationship with him. This unresolved attachment could manifest in her relationship outside her familial one, she did not have a proper imagination of how men were and her role in her relationship with them, therefore she had no friends except for her brother Nick and tried so hard to keep him close to her regarding the fact that Nick lied to her and was not so trustworthy after Amy’s disappearance, he also had not told her anything about his affair with Andie. Her resilience and complex emotional issues are defence mechanisms against her

¹³ Freud, Sigmund. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Basic Books, 2000, p.118.

father's misogynistic behaviour and thoughts that she had witnessed from an early age, the affection she never got from her father except for when she did not act like a girl.

2.3. *Gone Girl* and Neurotic Development

2.3.1. Neurotic Needs

Karen Horney has significant theories that contribute to an individual's neurosis. Her works marked a distinct shift from the early focus of many psychoanalysts who anchored their theories on unconscious desires and the early years of childhood's effect on an individual's whole life. Instead, her theoretical pursuits are mostly towards the complex interplay between neurosis and other factors such as anxiety, and depression, as well as cultural and societal expectations. In her book *Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis* (1945), Horney introduces the neurotic needs of individuals due to cultural, familial, and societal issues. These needs are the need for affection and approval, the need for a partner who will take over one's life, the need for power, the need to exploit others, the need for social recognition or prestige, the need for personal admiration, the need for personal achievement, the need for self-sufficiency and independence, the need for perfection and unassailability, the need to restrict one's life within narrow borders. In *Gone Girl*, the character Amy Dunne exemplifies a woman with neurotic needs according to the fact that she is dependent on her husband's, parents', and society's validation. She shows to have manipulative behavior in many ways to curate her image as a quintessential wife and a victim of marriage. Her diary entries serve as a pivotal manipulation tool. These entries are not real-life experiences but are contrived to influence the perception of the public. This behavior is a result of her internal psychological landscape and her external social environment. A deep-seated anxiety about her self-worth resulted in seeking validation from others through manipulation and neurotic behaviours. As an example of one of the entries, she says: "I'm making the best of a really bad situation, and the situation is mostly bad because my husband, who brought me here, who uprooted me to be closer to his ailing parents, seems to have lost all interest in both me and said ailing parents." (Flynn, 154)

While on the surface, Amy's neurotic desire for affection might portray her as a victim, a deeper analysis reveals that she needs dominance and control, according to Horney's theory of the need for power. Through the process of framing her husband for her disappearance, Amy unveils an exercise of control and domination. By creating a situation in

which Nick is the aggressor of the story, Amy asserts her superiority and control, not only over Nick's life but also over his public image. This makes Amy a very complex character, the one who needs affection, but at the same time is controlling and wants to dominate her husband and is ready to gain this authority at any cost. Amy's planned actions go far beyond punishing him for his infidelity, there are deeper and more pervasive intentions to gain dominance and control over him in their relationship. This is evident not only in her actions but also in her manipulative narration in diary entries. These manipulations extend to the annual treasure hunts she provides on their anniversary; this is a tradition that Amy transforms into a mechanism of control. Each clue that Nick uncovers is a symbol of Amy's dominion, not only over their relationship but also over the public's perception of him. Through the story, Nick's getting in touch with people who were friends with Amy before reveals a historical pattern of behavior that shows Amy has exercised her power on them in a way that is neurotic. These old stories make the audience believe that Amy has always tried to neurotically control others by manipulating them. From childhood, she had found a way to exert her influence over others, a pattern of behaviour that is seen also in her adult relationships. One of Amy's ex-boyfriends heard the story of her disappearance through media coverage, so he reached out to Nick to offer sympathy and share his own experience with Amy. His communication with Nick serves as a witness to Amy's neurosis in gaining power. He elaborated on Amy's proclivity for assuming a god-like stance in situations that are unpleasant to her. She aspires to have ultimate authority over aspects of her life that are significant to her. This exchange of words makes Nick suspicious about the whole disappearance. He recounted their initial encounter with Amy at a party, where Amy presented herself as an attractive, cool girl. However. As time progressed in their interaction, he realized that the image Amy was showing of herself was not real and she was pretending to be who she is. After this realization, he tries to detach from her gradually and to distance himself from Amy without the explicit termination of their relationship. Yet, Amy's unusual reaction to this separation was that:¹⁴

¹⁴ Amy comes over to my place one night, I'd been seeing this other girl like a month and Amy comes over, and she's all back like she used to be. She's got some bootleg DVD of a comic I like, an underground performance in Durham, and she's got a sack of burgers, and we watch the DVD, and she's got her leg flopped over mine, and then she's nestling into me, and...sorry. She's your wife. My point is: the girl knew how to work me. And we end up...consensual sex. And she leaves and everything is fine. Kiss goodbye, the whole shebang. The next thing I know, two cops are at my door, and they've done a rape kit on Amy, and she has wounds consistent with forcible rape. And she has ligature marks on her wrists, and when they search my apartment, there on the headboard of my bed are two ties, like neckties, tucked down near the mattress, and the

He warned Nick to fear Amy and any plans she might have for him. This narrative mirrors what she is doing to Nick now, where she once again orchestrated a scenario to cast herself as the victim. This part of the story made Nick aware of how far Amy can go in this framing and planning. This not only highlights Amy's adeptness in faking her victimhood but also serves as a warning to Nick about Amy's intention to fulfill her neurotic needs. Karen Horney's psychoanalytic theories provide great insights into exploring the complex interplay between neurosis and manipulation within interpersonal relationships. In her seminal work, "Our Inner Conflicts: A constructive theory of neurosis"¹⁵, she delves into the neurotic compulsion for dominion as a defence mechanism to suppress anxiety. This form of anxiety comes from feelings of loneliness, incapacity, and uncertainty about the individual's position in society. The neurotic individual endeavours to exercise control over their surrounding as a means to show their significance and their sense of value. Manipulation emerges then as a tactic in fulfilling this need. Amy exemplifies this tendency through her interactions with people, she manipulates her husband, family, and the public to exercise power and control over them. According to K. Horney's theories, individuals who are neurotic perceive their environment as antagonistic, a perspective that forces them to show defense mechanisms in their communication with others. This neurotic pursuit of power emerges as a response to underlying feelings of inadequacy and helplessness within the society they are living in. This neurotic desire for authority and power is the result of living in a society in which someone is neglected. Such behavior is an unhealthy craving for validation from others and aims at mitigating the deep-seated insecurities that fuel the neurotic individual. She says:¹⁶

ties are, quote, consistent with ligature marks... couple of weeks later I got a note, anonymous, typed *maybe next time you'll think twice*. (Flynn, 297)

¹⁵ Horney, Karen. *Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1945.

¹⁶ The neurotic develops a rigid and irrational ideal of strength which makes him believe he should be able to master any situation, no matter how difficult, and should master it right away. This ideal becomes linked with pride, and as a consequence the neurotic considers weakness not as a danger, but also as a disgrace. He classifies people as either strong or weak, admiring the former and despising the latter. He goes to extremes also in what he considers to be weakness. He has more or less contempt for all persons who agree with him or give in to his wishes, who have inhibitions or do not control their emotions so closely that they always show an impassive face. (Horney, 166)

A critical moment in the story is when Amy is confronted with her vulnerability and helplessness. Losing all her money and savings due to a robbery, she finds herself in a dangerous situation. According to Horney's conception of neurotic characters, Amy thinks on her mind to reach ways of support such as reaching out to her parents or husband. However, she decides to manipulate Desi, her ex-boyfriend who had been obsessed with her all these years since their high school days. Her ultimate decision is leveraging Desi to find dominance not only over Nick, but also over her narrative, the investigators, her parents, the media, and the public. This pivotal decision marked a significant reversal to the story and her tactics of manipulation. Initially started by the robbery that made her vulnerable, Amy could not tolerate her susceptibility and decided to be even more manipulative. Following a plan to murder Desi, her actions were in the most sinister phase of her plan. This act brought about an evolution in her neurotic development, her language and actions started to become more malevolent, unyielding, and chillingly detached, like that of a perpetrator. This shift in the plan represents that her manipulative actions are going way beyond moral ethics, and she is prepared to achieve her neurotic needs at any cost. She says very cruel things about Desi, she says:

“Desi, another man along the Mississippi. I always knew he might come in handy. It's good to have at least one man you can use for anything.” (Flynn, 345)

Amy's perception of vulnerability as tantamount to existential danger mirrors Horney's insights into neurotic psychoanalysis. Horney believed that individuals with neurotic diseases perceive any form of weakness as a direct threat to their self-image. This view justifies Amy's actions and thoughts and her extreme responses to vulnerability. For her, being vulnerable is dangerous for her existence which compels her to show neurotic actions as a means of defence.

2.3.2. The Idealized Self-image and the Tyranny of the Shoulds

Karen Horney's theories suggest that individuals idealize their self-image as a mechanism to escape their true selves. This idealized self serves as a tool with which they measure their self-worth, often leading to a gap between this unattainable self and who they are. The majority of people imagine this idealized image in their minds, but Amy views this image in her parents' book series called “Amazing Amy”. This series presents an exaggerated, flawless version of Amy who is always steps ahead of her and has lots of success and achievements in her life. Amy has been caught in the shadow of this image since

she was born, she continually measures herself with this ideal image and thinks that she is lovelier in the eyes of her parents and society. This not only intensifies her feelings of inadequacy but also distorts her sense of identity. In the book, she says:¹⁷

Sigmund Freud's theory of the "ideal ego" in his book *"The Ego and the Id"*, offers insightful perspectives into Amy's psychological state. He differentiates this "ideal ego" and the "ego ideal", which further clarifies Amy's struggle. According to him, the ideal ego is the unreachable one that an individual wishes to be, this ego usually aligns with the standards of society, while the ego ideal is the part of the self that judges internal actions based on these standards, functioning as an internal critic. Amy is trying to model the character of Amazing Amy to be loved by her parents and society. However, the gap between her idealized self and true self reveals an internal conflict. This false mindset leads her to present her real self to some people, only to find that this revelation often results in their estrangement. Amy's expectation of Nick to be the ideal partner reflects her own neurotic need for perfection. This pursuit of being perfect is related to the internal conflict she has with the persona of Amazing Amy, a character with not only an ideal partner but also a perfect individual that Amy never will be able to become. When she finds out that Nick cannot be the perfect husband she strived for, a role that has been represented in an unreal way in Amazing Amy's books, she responds to her unfulfilled desires by manipulating him. By faking her disappearance, Amy seeks to compel Nick into embodying the archetype of a perfect husband she has long yearned for, or to punish him for not being able to fulfill her expectations. Karen Horney posits that the real self presents the reality of an individual, while the idealized self is a construct, often shaped by societal expectations. In Amy's case, this dichotomy between her real self and the idealized version constructed by her parents and praised by society, largely influenced her internalized standards of perfection. Amy's reaction to Nick's cheating contrasts with the image of a flawless partner she envisioned for herself. This discovery made her react neurotically. The betrayal she finds in Nick violates her concept of an ideal

¹⁷ Just last night was my parents' book party. *Amazing Amy and the Big Day*. Yup, Rand and Marybeth couldn't resist. They've given their daughter's namesake what they cannot give their daughter: a husband! Yes, for book twenty, Amazing Amy is getting married! Wheee. No one cares. No one wanted Amazing Amy to grow up, least of all me. Leave her in kneesocks and hair ribbons and let *me* grow up, unencumbered by my literary alter ego, my paper-bound better-half. The me I was supposed to be. (Flynn, 37)

partnership, making her show a dramatic response aimed at gaining control and asserting her power within their marriage.

Donald Winnicott's seminal paper called "*Ego Distortions in Terms of True and False Self*" introduces the influential concepts of the "true self" and the "false self". According to him, the true self is the individual's authentic self and experiences, their original feelings, desires, and expressions. This concept signifies the aspects of a person that are real and unaffected by external influences and societal expectations. The true self is one's capacity to have a real connection with others and can be creative and alive to the reality of the moments. Winnicott emphasized that the true self is so important for character development and psychological well-being. Amy's engagement with her false self is tied to the shadow cast by Amazing Amy. Insisting on embracing this false self intensifies in her marriage, as she strives to fulfill society's standard image as a perfect wife. However, understanding that she cannot reach that image, and finding her husband's infidelity, compels her to her manipulative actions. These actions are not only for revenge but also a deep struggle with her identity and authenticity. Her pathological behaviours are results of her identity crisis, her inability to be loved for her true self leads to a violent rejection of the false self. According to Winnicott, the false self is a defensive reaction that exists at the same time with external expectations at the cost of suppressing the true self's wishes and desires. Amy's life is an identity crisis quest and the constant need for validation in the case of societal relationships.

Karen Horney, in her book "*Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle towards Self-Realization*" (1970), discusses a significant concept called "the tyranny of the shoulds". This is a psychological concept that refers to the demanding, unrealistic standards people set for themselves as a result of a gap between who they are and who they expect themselves to be. Amy is an example of an individual who has put herself under so much pressure for who she thinks she should be. This constant struggle to be what someone cannot be, will leave negative outcomes in her life, leading to anxiety, depression, and a sense of failure when she cannot meet these unrealistic needs. The vicious cycle is: the more one fails to meet these shoulds, the more he or she will engage in destructive behaviors. Amy's situation is an example of how awareness of one's neurotic behaviors, has no effect on changing those behaviors. The fact that she is aware of her manipulative actions has created an internal conflict in her, a clash between her real self and her idealized, unattainable self. Her inability to accept her real self has prevented her from having a normal adult life with normal

relationships. The loneliness and isolation she experiences are direct consequences of her inability to engage with others in non-manipulative relationships. Instead, she is trapped in her neurotic thoughts and behaviors, hostility towards everyone, and a feeling of revenge against everyone, especially her husband, Nick. This highlights a critical look at societal expectations from women, to embody perfection in all situations and every day of their lives. Amy has internalized and suppressed these pressures like many other women and the destructive consequences are shown in the story, how far these women can go to turn off the sense of revenge caused by the suppression of their anger towards their family and society. In general, it can be said that Amy is the victim of society who becomes a perpetrator to her surrounding.

2.3.3. Repression and Projection in Amy Dunne's Behaviour

In her book *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*¹⁸, Karen Horney explains what happens when an individual represses her hostility in a way that goes out of control. She says:¹⁹

Amy's actions can be interpreted as both manifestations of repression and projection. For years, she has repressed her feelings of hostility, towards her parents, friends, society, and now her husband Nick because she wants to maintain that image of perfection everyone wants from her. The disparity between this false self and her true self has led to this repressed hostility. As Karen Horney says, when this hostility goes to a level beyond control, it becomes a source of anxiety that the person must mitigate. Amy's way of dealing with this anxiety is through projecting it to the outside world, "moving against others". By framing her murder and putting the blame on her husband, she is projecting the vengeance she wants on him. In Amy's case, projecting this hostility to Nick and showing herself as a victim will allow her to keep her perfect self-image. This projection is not a conscious decision, but a psychological necessity to preserve her sense of control and justify her actions to herself and society. The

¹⁸ Horney, Karen. *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1937.

¹⁹ The individual may project his hostility to the outside world. He pretends that the destructive impulses come not from him, but from someone or something outside. The result is that this person now assumes formidable proportions in his mind, partly because such a person becomes endowed with the same quality of ruthlessness that his own repressed impulses have, partly because in any danger the degree of potency depends not only on the factual conditions but also on the attitude taken toward them. The more defenceless one is, the greater the danger appears. (Horney, 69)

image she creates of Nick to the public, a cheating criminal husband is created by her vulnerability and defenselessness. The more defenseless she feels, the greater the threat becomes to Nick. As Horney asserts the degree of perceived danger is directly influenced by factual conditions and above all the individual's subjective experiences.

What is interesting about the novel is that it has been written from the perspective of both sides, Amy thinks that she has been victimized in this marriage without seeing her destructive behaviors that we hear from Nick's viewpoint. Nick also thinks that he is innocent although deeply he knows he is not. This lack of self-awareness from both sides can lead to a distorted relationship and way of thought, the way the individual regards only the partner as the source of harm and sees herself/himself as innocent and victim. They may suffer in the marriage thinking that they are being so devoted but in return, they are receiving unfaithfulness, cruelty, and a very destructive relationship. These all may lead to anger that mostly will be repressed. Amy, at various points, presents herself as a devoted wife, who has made significant sacrifices in her marriage. In a part when they decide to leave New York and go to take care of Nick's mom, she says:

“He promised to take care of me, and yet I feel afraid. I feel like something is going wrong, very wrong, and that it will get even worse. I don't feel like Nick's wife. I don't feel like a person at all: I am something to be loaded and unloaded, like a sofa or a cuckoo clock. I am something to be tossed into a junkyard, thrown into the river, if necessary. I don't feel real anymore. I feel like I could disappear.” (Flynn, 115)

Here Amy articulates a deep sense of alienation from the world, she has lost her identity, and she does not know who she is anymore. She feels dehumanized and objectified by her marriage. She thinks that the marriage she has is all flawed, although Karen Horney states that:

“A wife who is ignorant of her impulses to ruin her husband and subjectively convinced that she is devoted may, because of this mechanism, consider her husband to be a brute wanting to harm her.” (Horney, 74)

2.3.4. Anxiety and Neurosis

Karen Horney explains Freud's viewpoint on anxiety, saying Freud believed that anxiety stems from repressed sexual desires which led to physical tensions and then anxiety. But later, she revised his view about neurotic anxiety, stating that it stems from a fear of pursuing impulses that could lead to external dangers, both sexual and aggressive impulses.

This focused not on repression, but on fear associated with potential consequences of acting on certain impulses. However, she says that her concept of anxiety suggests an integration of both, moving beyond the physiological explanation of repressed sexual desires. She proposes that anxiety stems from the fear associated with repressed impulses, both sexual and aggressive. Except Karen Horney does not see sexuality as a specific source of anxiety and she confronted Freud in this theory. She believed that the repressed hostile impulses are more important to be mentioned rather than sexuality. Amy shows signs of anxiety in the novel due to the high expectations her parents and society put upon her. It is seen in the book when she says her parents have asked him to not take the Amazing Amy personally, but she cannot because they have always cared more about the perfect Amazing Amy than her. She says:

“My parents, *two child psychologists*, chose this particular form of passive-aggressiveness toward their child was not just fucked up but also stupid and weird and hilarious. So be it.” (Flynn, 38)

She grew up in a family that abused her by idealizing her identity to make money and also expecting her to be like the version they had made of her for years and these led to anxiety and neurotic impulses. Nick also suffers from anxiety due to his family situation in a different way. He had a complex relationship with his father who was both abusive and misogynistic. Growing up, Nick always had this anxiety about being a man like his father and he is constantly in an internal conflict with himself not to be like him, therefore he is always searching for approval from women around him. When he finds out that Amy sees him as a regular husband, he strives a lot to make it right but not in the proper way. After being disappointed, he starts an extramarital relationship with a girl younger than him with less experience in relationships to get what he wants from her unconsciously. He is always being complimented by Andie and he thinks that finally he can find solace in this relationship, but everything goes the other way round. During the novel, Nick remembers lots of stories with his father like they are always there at the back of his mind. He says his father always addressed women as *dumb bitches* and the only moments his sister, Go, felt to be loved by him was when she treated him in a masculine way. His father used to tell Nick to stop crying when he needed to because he believed *men don't cry*. He says after his parents' divorce, his mom started to be lively again and live a happy life as she always wanted to and the people around her believed that *the old Maureen was back* which means she used to be happy before her marriage. Nick had told Amy before that after his parents' divorce, their father did not come to visit the kids at all, so Nick had found a story for himself to justify his dad's vacant

place and the story was that he was not his father but a very important figure called “Mr. Brown” who was lots of the time busy helping the U.S. and he couldn’t visit them so Nick grew up with a father who never, ever apologized, so when Nick feels he screwed up, he goes on offense. I know this, and I can wait it out, usually.” (Flynn, 79)

Many times, in the story Nick confesses that he never likes to be a father like his father was to him. When he decides to ask Amy to try for a baby, he specifically says the reason is that I want to be a father different from who my father was and raise a boy who is not like me.

2.4. Unveiling Mystique: *Gone Girl* and Feminine Mystique

In her book “*Feminine Mystique*”²⁰, Betty Friedan delves into a critical analysis of the societal expectations that confined women in the domestic area in post-World War II in America, but reading through the book shows that it can relate to most women from every part of the world. She coined the term “feminine mystique” to describe the ideology of a patriarchal society; that women’s role is to be a housewife and a mother. Friedan argues that it is difficult to change this ideology since for years it has also been in the educational system. She believes that:

“It is folly to ignore the signs which warn us that the present terms in which women are lured by their curiosities and derives developed under the same educational system as boys...are bad for both men and women.” (Friedan, 168)

2.4.1. Amy and the Problem that Has No Name

Betty Friedan’s concept of “the problem that has no name” is discussed in her book “*Feminine Mystique*”. She describes it as a deep feeling of dissatisfaction and desperation among women in the mid-20th century in the United States, although it can be about any other woman who has the same condition. She believed that after World War II, many American women felt a deep emptiness because all they could do was to be a mother and a wife, they did not have the chance to be truly in society with their

²⁰ Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1963.

fathers, brothers, or husbands. This dismissed their desires and wishes for anything beyond their home. She says:²¹

Amy is a character who on the surface appears to embody the image of a perfect life according to social standards: she is a beautiful, intelligent lady who is also married and has her own life. But as the reader reads through the novel, it is revealed that Amy is suffering from something like a problem that has no name. At first, she is happy with Nick and her marriage, but living years with him and later becoming a housewife, shapes all the problems in her that have no name. In her diary entries, she talks a lot about Nick, both when she was a happy housewife and when she realized this was not what she wanted in her life. But even from the first parts of the novel, one can realize that this whole idea of becoming a housewife is ridiculous for Amy. Just after they get married, she says:

“I am fat with love! Husky with ardor! Morbidly obese with devotion! A happy, busy bumblebee of marital enthusiasm. I positively hum around him, fussing and fixing. I have become a strange thing. I have become a wife. I have become a wife, I have become a bore, and I have been asked to forfeit my independent young feminist card. I don’t care.” (Flynn, 49)

This explains her internal conflicts and commentary on the roles and expectations of marriage from a woman. She indicates that marriage is a transformation from being an independent woman with identity to a conventional wife role, or even an object as she calls herself a “thing”. She highlights that societal expectations force women to just say “I don’t care” and conform to their rules as being a housewife and a mother. She critiques all these viewpoints with a sarcastic tone, talking about her loss of identity and conforming to a role that she deeply does not want. Although her response to all these societal pressures is extreme, it can be a metaphor for all the rage women would feel as a result of societal pressures upon them. The act of framing her husband and blaming him for her murder in public is a consequence of years of feeling invisible and

²¹ The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the bed, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night_ she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question___ is this all? (Friedan, 44)

powerless in society. After moving to Missouri, she even feels more powerless and alone, constantly complaining about the fact that she is living there now and does not like being a housewife with the women around her. In a part, she claims:

“Happy anniversary to me! One full month as a Missouri resident, and I am on my way to becoming a good Midwesterner. Yep, I have gone cold turkey off all things East Coast, and I have earned my thirty-day chip (here it would be a potato chip). I am taking notes, I am honouring traditions. I am the Margaret Mead of the goddamn Mississipp.” (Flynn, 24)

Margaret Mead is a famous American cultural anthropologist who is renowned for her in-depth studies of the cultures of the South Pacific, particularly in Samoa. She immersed herself in their daily routine to gain a deep understanding of their ways of life. Her comparison of herself to Margaret Mead shows that she feels to be an outsider in her new town, the one who is putting effort into adapting to the new life and environment. She feels forced to embrace her new society, with all the women around her being happy as housewives and with fewer job opportunities for women.

2.4.2. *Gone Girl* and Sexuality

Sexuality in the novel is portrayed as a tool used to control women and a way to manipulate men for personal and societal gain. One of the most striking aspects of sexuality in *Gone Girl* is how it is depicted as a mechanism for manipulation and control. Amy uses her sexuality at some points strategically to manipulate and control others, and that is where she is portrayed as a perpetrator and not a victim. Soon she broadens this manipulation from her marriage, and personal life to the public and media. In her diary entries, Amy portrays Nick as a controlling husband who used sex as a way to control her, or even sometimes a rapist who had sex with her only because he needed the orgasm with no feelings. She says:

“He uses me for sex when he needs to. He presses me against the table or over the back of the bed and fucks me, silent until the last few moments, those few quick grunts, and then he releases me, he puts a palm on the small of my back, his one gesture of intimacy, and he says something that is supposed to make it seem like a game; you’re so sexy, sometimes I can’t control myself.” (Flynn, 80)

Through this description, Amy is stating a pattern of behavior that Nick has, the one that is abusive and toxic to her. This supports her saying that she is afraid of her husband and what he might do to her someday. She intended to manipulate the public, especially the investigators because she was sure that they would finally find her diary. Amy is using her sexuality as a weapon to justify her actions, and to change her image in public and society. She wants to represent Nick as the villain husband to the eyes of the world, and the media. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, interpreted human behavior and mental state through the lens of libido, which he defined as the energy of the sexual drive as a component of life instinct. He attributed the neurotic individual's seeking for attachment and clinginess to unresolved sexual desires. He defines these behaviors as manifestations of the libido seeking fulfillment and expression. Karen Horney was critical of this emphasis of Freud on sexual factors in the development of personality and neuroses. She believed that such behaviors could be better interpreted through social and cultural perspectives. On the contrary, she believed that what she called basic anxiety was the source of these behaviors. The tendency of neurotic people to cling themselves to others could be seen to fight basic anxiety, seeking security and approval from the outside world. Horney exclusively confronts Freud's theory of penis envy, saying that it is not biological determinism that has made women feel inferior to men, but it is the societal and cultural constructs which have made them feel so. In her book *"Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis"* (1945), she says that:

"It is not inner conflicts which are the given data of psychoanalysis, but the anxieties, defences, and symptoms resulting from them. And these phenomena are not the outcome of the factors Freud assume them to be but are determined by the whole situation in which the child finds itself.

In *Gone Girl*, Amy's manipulative behavior related to sexuality and her identity can be studied as a form of compensation for the societal pressures on her as a woman. Society dictates to her that as a woman she always needs to be perfect, sexually or personality-wise, a perfect daughter and wife. Amy uses her sexuality as a weapon both in her marriage and in relationships with other men, to gain power and control and punish them and to achieve what she needs to achieve. In her relationship with Nick, she uses it as a way to get closer to Nick to realize what's on his mind. One of the most important instances is when she gets back home after her fake disappearance. After her

return, she is aware of the fact that she is considered as a woman who is the victim of rape both by Nick and Desi, and a female victim is always who the patriarchal society always respects, therefore she is aware that she is not in a social danger. She threatens Nick to condemn him for her behavior all the time, and Nick also knows that nobody is going to believe him anymore since his wife is now who society wants her to be: a victim. Amy uses the expectation of her sexual reunion with Nick as a means to be able to control him. By doing so, she can make sure that Nick remains in the marriage, otherwise, her public image will be destroyed. After her return, one of her attempts is to make Nick have sex with her so that the public knows they are truly happy together now, but Nick refuses to sleep with her on the same bed since he knows he will be manipulated again. Amy says:

“He won’t sleep with me yet. He sleeps in the downstairs guest room with the door locked. But one day I will wear him down, I will catch him off guard and he will lose the energy of the nightly battle, and he will get in bed with me. In the middle of the night, I’ll turn to face him and press myself against him. I’ll hold myself to him like a climbing, coiling vine until I have invaded every part of him and made him mine.”
(Flynn, 425)

Meanwhile, Nick says in the story that he is aware of the fact that his wife intends to sexually manipulate him as she has done with other men in her life, and he confesses that he is truly afraid of Amy. In a part when Amy gets back, Nick repeats what she says to him at home all the time:

“We’ve never had conversations about my paranoia, because we’re pretending to be in love and I’m pretending not to be frightened of her. But she’s made glancing mentions of it: *You know Nick, you can sleep in bed with me, like, actually sleep. It will be ok, I promise. What happened with Desi was an isolated incident. Close your eyes and sleep.*” (Flynn, 430)

Amy reminding “what happened to Desi” to Nick is a controlling reminder. It subtly reminds Nick of the lengths she is willing to go to take control of her story and what happened to Desi might happen to him as well. It appears that a loving wife is asking her husband to feel safe with her but the underlying message is a threat: I am capable of murdering you if you do not obey me. Her invitation to “actually sleep” is a manipulation of the marital bed’s symbolic sanctity. She wants to normalize their relationship in the eyes of the public and uses this assurance to further bind Nick to

herself. It is not just about the physical manipulation, but also the psychological game related to the sexuality she is playing.

2.5. Media and Female Victimization

The role of media in female victimization is a complex issue, how representations of media can influence societal perceptions, and higher expectations, and standards regarding women's behaviours. In *Gone Girl*, media plays an important role in the narrative and influences the characters in many ways, their decisions, and their actions. One of the key roles media plays in this novel is to change the public's opinion and understanding of the story. The novel also critiques the impact of media on the lives of individuals, especially in a closed-minded society. *Gone Girl* critiques the media's sensitive approach to crime and the impact it has on public opinion. The media's obsession with sensitive crime stories can change the result of that criminal act and bring out a personal tragedy in someone's life when no truth and justice can be made.

2.5.1. Perpetuation of Stereotypes

Media often follows the stereotype of women as the weak gender who deserve victimization through certain depictions. It makes heroines of women who have been victimized in their lives, this way it normalizes the violence against women which results in gender inequalities. This occurs in many platforms like TV, movies, magazines, news, and social media where women are depicted as being sexy and sexual, passive, or vulnerable. The creatures need to be always taken care of because they are not able to take care of themselves, therefore they need men to be by their sides. In *Gone Girl*, the Cool Girl monologue is the representation of these gender stereotypes. In the novel, Amy says men always aspire to have an obedient, Cool Girl, no matter what they say. She says:

“There are variations to the window dressing, but believe me, he wants Cool Girl, who is basically the girl who likes every fucking thing he likes and doesn't ever complain. I like strong women is a quote for I hate strong women.” (Flynn, 241)

Amy's monologue encapsulates how women are portrayed in society and media to be pleasant for men. The Cool Girl is the effortlessly perfect girl who aligns with media's size standards, and other standards of coolness. The media suggests that a woman's value is dependent on her appeal to men, and this puts women under lots of pressure. The media plays an important role in perpetuating these stereotypes by

showing cool girl archetypes on TV, social media platforms, literature, and advertisements and normalizing this image.

2.5.1.1. Influencing Social Norms

Media portrayals of women contribute to shaping new societal expectations and standards, especially about women. When women are always shown as vulnerable, victimized gender that needs to be rescued by men, it reinforces the public opinion that they are unable to lead their lives. Many women will believe it as a fact and live a life in which they need their fathers, husbands, brothers, or a man to take care of them. A part of the *Gone Girl* novel that shows this is when people and the media realize that Amy is pregnant. From this part, everyone regarded Amy as a victim of domestic violence by her husband only because it is common in the media to think about a pregnant woman as a vulnerable one. Even Amy critiques women who because of these stereotypes believe that pregnancy can save their marriage. Nick says in the novel:

“Boney and Giplin had already heard my wife was pregnant and decided to make it a strategy. They clearly really believed I killed her.” (Flynn, 216)

Nick’s reflection on how Boney and Gilpin used the pregnancy of Amy as a strategy against him shows that the media has the power to shape the public’s perception. Media acts as a tool for social control, showing what behaviors are acceptable and what are not.

2.5.1.2. Impacting Self-perception

The stereotypes about women made by media, not only change the societal expectations and higher the pressures on women, but also make them believe that this is who they are. Many women believe that they are destined to be inferior because of their biological differences and they do not have a high self-image of themselves. What *Gone Girl* shows to its readers is that for a woman like Amy, the only way to be believed as a good wife is to manipulate the media and the public. In the novel *Gone Girl*, many parts are showing the media’s impact on self-image, one of them is when in Ellen Abbot’s show some photos of Nick smiling are shown accusing him of the murderer of his wife:

“Cut to the photo of me at the press conference, the jackass grin. Another of me waving and smiling like a pageant queen as I got out of my car.” (Flynn, 177)

2.5.1.3. Justify Gender Violence

By putting this pressure on women that they are responsible for what happens to them in society, and blaming for victimization on them, the media can make the public think that the seriousness of gender-based violence is not so sensitive, so they regard women as natural victims and do not try to confront this way of thought.

2.5.1.4. Overshadow Achievements

When the media regards women as inferior beings and the ones who deserve to be victimized, any achievement of women in that society will be overshadowed and women will be less motivated to achieve their goals and desires.

2.5.2. Sensationalism

The cases of crime against women usually become covered by the media in a very sensational way, women cannot be murderers, they can be wives and mothers who obey their men. It is hard to believe for the public that a woman, capable of being a mother, is also capable of being a murderer and it has nothing to do with her gender. When a society expects them to be full-time wives and mothers, it does not expect them to be murderers or criminals in general. So, when a murder happens, and the killer, the criminal of the story is a woman, it is hard to believe in a society that says women can only be victims, not perpetrators. The novel masterfully shows the media's sensational judgment in a criminal case related to a woman. It challenges the belief that women are incapable of being violent and they are always on the victim's side. It depicts Amy, as an intelligent woman who is also popular in the media, but at the same time a manipulative character who confronts the norms of society and the media. It challenges the audience to be unbiased and put away the simplistic gender stereotypes perpetuated by the media. There is a part in the novel where Amy is talking about Ellen Abbott, a news reporter who covers the stories of missing women. She says about her:²²

Here Amy ironically appreciates Ellen Abbott. This shows how some figures in media can change not only public opinion but also the results of cases. Amy is aware of the power of media on public opinion since for years she has lived a life based on what people believe

²² Ellen Abbott is a part of my plan too. The biggest cable crime-news show in the country. I adore Ellen Abbott, I love how protective and maternal she gets about all the missing women on her show, and how rabid-dog vicious she is once she seizes on a suspect, usually the husband. She is America's voice of female righteousness. Which is why I want her to cover my story. The public must turn against Nick. It's as much a part of his punishment in prison, for darling Nicky, who spends so much time worrying about people liking him, to know he is universally hated. (Flynn, 263)

her to be, the Amazing Amy. Now she is manipulating the media to take advantage of her story.

2.5.3. Visibility and Awareness

Positively thinking, the media brings public awareness about the issue of female victimization. It can inform the public about various forms of victimization of women and make them aware of their rights regarding confrontation with these victimizations. It informs the public about cases of domestic abuse, systematic inequality, sexual harassment, etc. It also has the power to take self-confidence back to women who have been victimized, narrating their stories and making the public sympathize with them. Social media campaigns can quickly raise support for women influence policy reform and shift a cultural norm. In the novel, the intense public and media scrutiny that the characters experience, especially Nick as a husband with a missing wife, reflects the double-edged sword of visibility. Visibility can also lead to false judgments, sensationalism, and further victimization.

2.5.4. Public Perception and Policy Influence

Positive media representations that are accurate can foster empathy in public. This can highlight the experiences of female victims and mobilize the community to support them. Conversely, negative media representations, such as those that blame women for their victimization, can grow harmful attitudes and stigma. This can result in a lack of support for real female victims, both legally and socially, and make victims think that maybe it is not a good idea to come forward. The way media manipulation affects public opinion about Amy and Nick highlights the sensitivity of the role of media in covering victimization.

2.5.5. Social Media and Cyberbullying

Social media has transformed the landscape of communication. While it facilitates communication, it also opens up a new avenue of victimization, like cyberbullying or online harassment. Unlike traditional forms of bullying, cyberbullying can have an indefinite effect on someone's life, accessible to a wide audience. The effects can be devastating, leading to anxiety, depression, alienation, self-harm, or suicide, especially in women. *Gone Girl* shows the devastating effects media can have by ruining someone's image with the way it ended, forcing Nick to live with a monster who manipulated media and public opinion. This was a form of online or digital victimization that Nick experienced.

2.5.6. Media Literacy

The discussion on media literacy, particularly in the context of critically assessing the media representation of female victimization, is very important in this story. The whole novel intends to conclude that all these false perceptions and manipulations show that media needs more literacy, especially in analyzing the information from news outlets and social media. It encourages the audience to look beyond media narratives, just as Gillian Flynn said herself, to “look under the rock”. Amy converts the expectation that the media has for women, to be cool girls, the victim, the femme fatal. The depiction of violence in the novel serves as a point of analysis for media literacy. Considering how violence is portrayed in media, and its impacts on perceptions and converting reality. The novel can be seen as a tool for media literacy because it encourages the audience to be more critical about what they see in media and to be more discerning consumers of media. By teaching the audience to critically assess what they see, it counteracts the harmful gender stereotypes.

3. *Sharp Objects* and Identity Crisis in Female Characters

3.1. Introduction to the Novel

Another novel by Flynn published in 2006, is known as a masterful novel in exploring psychological traumas of the past and their effects on the human psyche. The way the author wrote of the intricacy of mental disorders in female characters of this novel has made Flynn influential in contemporary American Literature. The story is about a journalist’s life, Camille Preaker, returning to her small-town Wind Gap, Missouri, to write a report on serial murder cases of two teenage girls. These make her think about her past and the troubles she had, her broken relationship with her mother, Adora, loss of her sister, Marian, at a young age in her childhood. The novel examines her memories and how they have affected her identity and led her to become who she is now. The small-town setting represents a society that can be a part of an individual’s traumatic memories, a microcosm of societal expectations that exacerbate Camille’s struggle with her identity and mental health. The novel also delves into the complicated familial relationships and the destructive consequences of secrets in a family. Camille, while collecting pieces of clues to solve the crime case like a detective, is being faced with her traumas and starts to heal and solve them for herself. Her journey is more of a self-discovery journey because she realizes that to solve the murder case, she needs to heal her own old wounds first and unravel the truth about her own familial issues. The most important themes of the novel can be female victimization, mental disorders, and identity crisis as result

of societal expectations and familial issues. As such, the novel serves as a fertile ground for scholarly analysis, offering insights into how literature can illuminate the complexities of female victimization.

3.2. Camille Preaker's Journey

Camille is constantly fighting self-harm, and traumas, and going towards self-realization in her journey. Her internal monologues and destructive behaviors like self-harm represent a deep traumatic life with an identity crisis issue. Relying on Karen Horney's theories, this part of the chapter shows how societal expectations and familial issues lead to Camille's identity crisis and her mental problems. Returning to her hometown is the most important reason for remembering her traumas and unpleasant relationship with her mother. Her body, with so many words carved on it, serves as her defense mechanism to escape the unbearable psychological pain, a physical manifestation of her internal conflicts and to gain control over her pain by transforming it into something visible. The toxic relationship between her and her mother, emotional manipulation, neglect, and conditional love she has always given to her, have deeply influenced her loss of identity in a familial bond. Camille starts to relive her traumas because of going back there again. The first memory she remembers is of visiting the hunting shed of a neighbor:²³

The scenes she describes in detail represent that her early encounters with female sexual identity were violent. Karen Horney challenged Sigmund Freud's theories on female development and said that rather than sexual envy, social and cultural reasons will have more influence on the development of sexuality. Camille's discovery of violent, sexual images at that young age, influenced her early sexual exploration and encounter with objectifying women as the inferior sex. Camille's moment of arousal after she comes out could be the result of anxiety about her worth, her sexuality, identity, and her place in society. Horney states that basic anxiety usually manifests in childhood because of different familial, social, or cultural situations and she defines it as follows:

“A feeling of being small, insignificant, helpless, deserted, endangered, in a world that

²³ When I was still in grammar school, maybe twelve, I wandered into a neighbor boy's hunting shed, a wood-planked shack where the animals were stripped and split. Ribbons of moist, pink flesh dangled from strings, waiting to be dried for jerky. The dirt floor was rusted with blood. The walls were covered with photographs of naked women. Some of the girls were spreading themselves wide, others were being held down and penetrated. One woman was tied up, her eyes glazed, breasts stretched and veined like grapes, as a man took her from behind. I could smell them all in the thick, gory air. At home that night, I slipped a finger under my panties and masturbated for the first time, panting and sick. (Flynn, 16)

is out to abuse, cheat, attack, humiliate, betray, envy.” (Horney, 92)²⁴

According to Horney’s theories, this early confrontation with the violent sides of sexuality has made Camille feel humiliated and helpless in her life. Camille’s small town is not only cruel to her but also to the other girls. She is thinking of Betsy and Robert Nash, parents of Anne Nash, and how disappointing it must have been for them to have three girls in a row, but then after, they had their first son who covered the loss for them. She says it must be disappointing for them that every time they gave birth it was *a child popped out without a penis*. This explains the societal expectations and the discrimination she experienced in the small society she was born and raised. She ironically said that now that the poor girl has been a victim of a murder, the family and society have started to pay little attention to her. Betty Friedan, in her *Feminine Mystique*²⁵ discusses the effects that gender discrimination has on women. In her book, she confronts Sigmund Freud’s views regarding women. She particularly disagrees with the fact that Freud believed men are biologically and naturally superior creatures, and instead believed that these are not biological truths but results of societal standards of his time. She emphasized that today it is not believed that women are intellectually inferior to men and that these inferiorities were only the results of a lack of education for them and the fact that they were confined to domestic roles. She says:²⁶

In the Nash family, the birth of a son is celebrated as an important event after three daughters became aware of how extraneous they were to their family after their brother was born. These societal biases diminish women’s worth and may lead later to false self-perceptions or identity crises and mental disorders. Bob Nash says to Camille that she believes the murderer is a man because no woman can be a baby killer, although it is surprising to him that he did not sexually molest his daughter. The instant that the readers may find the novel a bit strange is when Camille has her first dream in her mother’s house:

“I dreamt my mother was slicing an apple onto thick cuts of meat and feeding it to me, slowly and sweetly, because I was dying.” (Flynn, 26)

²⁴ Karen, Horney. *Neurosis and Human Growth*, W. W. Norton & Company, 1950.

²⁵ Betty, Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1963.

²⁶ In any event, the degradation of women was taken for granted by Freud, and it is the key to his theory of femininity. The motive force of women’s personality, in Freud’s theory, was her envy of the penis, which causes her to feel as much depreciated in her own eyes “as in the eyes of the boy, and later perhaps of the man,” and leads, in normal femininity, to the wish for the penis of her husband, a wish that is never really fulfilled until she possesses a penis through giving birth to a son. In short, she is merely an “*homme manqué*,” a man with something missing. (Friedan, 137)

Sigmund Freud, in his book *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900)²⁷ writes that dreams are the royal road to the unconscious, a manifestation of repressed desires and unresolved conflicts. In her dream, the act of cutting apples into meat might symbolize her complex relationship with her mother, the act of nurturing is accompanied by violence. Apple is a symbol of wisdom which might be that she is aware of her mother's manipulative intentions and the way she internalizes it in her life. Her mother nurturing her because she is dying may show the violent nature of her mother's affection. In his book, Freud differentiates between the manifest and the latent content of a dream. The latent content here is that Camille is feeling destroyed by her mother's care. Freud says:

“Dreams reveal the true, if not the whole, nature of the dreamer, and are one means of making the hidden life of the psyche accessible to our understanding.” (Freud, 81)

He believed that although dreams show the true repressed unconsciousness of the individual, it does this by using symbolism. The symbolism in Camille's dream, the apple, meat, and her deathbed might symbolize deeper aspects of her toxic relationship with her mother, like her unfulfilled need for real affection or her feeling of overwhelming because of her mother's presence around her. In Natalie Keene's funeral, Camille meets her old high school friends and describes them as typical women with typical lives of husbands and children. They keep asking her if she is also married or has children, and when she says no, they become surprised. In the end, she states that she left the Keene house without saying a word because she was tired of socializing with such a closed-minded community. Camille is shown to have a drinking habit, drinking any time she feels pressure on herself to run away from her problems. When she comes back from Keen's house, she angrily goes to bed and tomorrow morning she wakes up feeling like drinking vodka because she feels overwhelmed returning to her hometown again, which for her is like returning to her traumas:

“I drank more vodka. There was nothing I wanted to do more than be unconscious again, wrapped in black, gone away. I saw raw. I felt swollen with potential tears, like a water balloon filled to burst. Begging for a pin prick. Wind Gap was unhealthy for me. This home was unhealthy for me.” (Flynn, 36)

Referencing Karen Horney's theory of basic anxiety, this excerpt demonstrates that Camille feels an absence of safety and protection in her environment, a sense of helplessness, and vulnerability to the setting she is now. Horney explained that individuals with basic anxiety often tend to magnify their vulnerability. Therefore, they may feel incapacitated, unable

²⁷ Sigmund, Freud. *Interpretation of Dreams*, Macmillan & Co., 1900.

to act without considering their weakness. This mindset then leads to a default attitude of *I can't* instead of accepting the challenge of taking action. (Horney, 267-270) When Camille goes to Chief Vickery to find some information about the murders, she remembers another memory related to her traumatic past in another place in the town, Garrett Park:²⁸

Garrett Park was a place of communal adolescent rebellion and a setting where Camille confronts her firsts, first kiss, first usage of drugs, and a mix of pleasure and discomfort. The rush from the tobacco and the rejection of the wine cooler can be symbols of her broader life trajectory, intense and overwhelming experiences that led to physical and emotional rejection. As she was doing the investigation, she came to know a teenage boy called James Capisi who claimed he was there with Natalie when the woman took her, and that was when Camille realized that the murderer was a woman, and this boy had already told everything to the police, but they did not believe him. When she asked the boy what she looked like the boy said she was *old like a mother*; saying the word *mother* when someone is talking about a murderer is not a usual thing in society. The description reflects Camille's relationship with her mother who hurt her and traumatized her in life. Camille goes to the bar to have a drink or two and starts talking about the case with a detective who is not from Wind Gap. When she goes home, she sees her mom, stepsister, and stepdad sitting in the living room and this reminds her of days when they spent time together with her dead sister, Marian. She describes that despite the heat, Adora made Amma wear a woolen gown while she kept ice cubes on her lips, this is a reminder to the audience of how controlling their mother is. For Camille, this scene is the representation of the unchangeable nature of Adora's toxic care. She remembers then:²⁹

Remembering this memory represents Camille's longing for her mother's attention and care now since she hasn't got any from then on. She knows that the reason why she doesn't have the attention now is because she used to reject her mother's medicine and wanted to be comfortable and her real self, but seems like her mother's controlling nature loved her if she behaved the way she wanted. Camille is feeling guilty and ashamed of rejecting her

²⁸ When I was in high school, Garrett Park was the place everyone met on weekends to drink beer or smoke pot or get jerked off three feet into the woods. It was where I was first kissed, at age thirteen, by a football player with a pack of chew tucked down in his gums. The rush of the tobacco hit me more than the kiss; behind his car I vomited wine cooler with tiny, glowing slices of fruit. (Flynn, 42)

²⁹ When I was a child, I remember my mother trying to prod me with ointments and oils, homemade remedies and homeopathic nonsense. I sometimes took the foul solutions, more often refused. Then Marian got sick, really sick, and Adora had more important things to do than coaxing me into swallowing wheat germ extract. Now I had a pang: all those syrups and tablets she proffered, and I rejected. That was the last time I had her full attention as a mother. I suddenly wished I'd been easier." (Flynn, 52)

mother's medicine because they were the only way she could have her mother's affection and love. Karen Horney emphasized the importance of early childhood development and the significant role that a child's caregivers play in that development. In *Neurotic Personality of our Time*³⁰, she says:

“The basic evil for a child is lack of genuine warmth and affection. The main reason why a child does not receive enough warmth and affection lies in the parents' incapacity to give it on account of their own neuroses.” (Horney, 80)

Camille labels herself as a *cutter, sniper, slicer, carver, and jabber*. She declares that she does this because her skin screams when she faces her traumas or any kind of problem that triggers her neurosis. The act of cutting can be interpreted both as a coping mechanism and self-expression. The choice of words she carves into her skin like *cook, cupcake, kitty, curls, baby-doll, harmful, and petticoat* represent her struggle with identity, family, and societal expectations. Dr. Kate Middleton, a well-known psychologist, in her book with Sarah Garvie, the director of *Selfharm.co.uk*, in their book *Self-harm: The Path to Recovery*³¹, explain the reasons why an individual commits self-harm. The first reason they discuss is triggering endorphin release which means endorphins are released in their brains and act as neurotransmitters; it helps them to relax and diminish the ability of negative thinking. The second one is that for neurotic individuals, self-harm is a way of communicating powerful emotions. This means that some emotions are just so severe for the individual that it is out of their control to express it to others or themselves, so the choice for them will be to communicate it through self-harm. The other reason for them is to be released from their anxiety. It can help them to stop their anxious thoughts most often and help them to calm their minds at that moment. But then a very important factor they state is dissociation. They define it as follows:

“Dissociation is a word used to describe a state of mind in which we are not consciously aware of what we are doing.” (Middleton & Garvie, 39)

They explain it as when a person faces a trauma, their minds may detach them from the present moment as a coping mechanism, therefore they are not aware of what they are doing. The act of self-harm happens in these situations to bring them back to awareness. (Middleton & Garvie, 34-39) Camille said:

“My first word, slashed on an anxious summer day at age thirteen: wicked. I woke up that morning, hot and bored, worried about the hours ahead. How do you keep safe when

³⁰ Karen, Horney. *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1937.

³¹ Kate Middleton & Sarah Garvey, *Self-harm: The Path to Recovery*, Lion Books, 2016.

your whole day is as wide and empty as the sky? Anything could happen.” (Flynn,54)

The cutting habit increased after her sister’s death. The last word she carved was when she was twenty-nine and the word was: *vanish*. She describes that now she cannot tolerate looking at herself in the mirror unless she’s fully covered. The sense of guilt and shame she is facing, and the discomfort with her feminine body are all reasons for what society and family have done to her. She declares that she wants to go to a surgeon someday to smooth her scars, but she fears the surgeon’s reaction. For now, the only solution she has for it is another destructive habit. She says:

“I drink so I don’t think too much about what I’ve done to my body and so I don’t do anymore.” (Flynn, 55)

She said that before she went to a hospital, they did not approve of her coping mechanism cutting habit as a calming act. This represents the gap between what the neurotic individual thinks is right and what the medical doctors or psychologists think is right for them. Camille also states that when she went to the hospital to be cured of her self-harm habit, most of the patients there were women under 25 years old, which can be a sign of society’s female victimization. One part in the story that reveals that Camille conflicts with her self-image and her identity is where she describes herself while looking in the mirror. She describes her face as beautiful and in harmony, while she cannot tolerate looking at her body. “I was lovely to look at, as long as I was fully clothed.” (Flynn, 63) Camille is against her identity and self-worth. She regards herself as lovely but just if she was healthy and happy. She believes that to be loved by others, she must hide her true self because everyone would love that lovely feminine face, but when they see her real self with her scars coming from her emotional turmoil, she will not be loved by society anymore. She says:

“Had things turned out differently, I might have amused myself with a series of heart-wretched lovers. I might have dallied with a brilliant man. I might have married.” (Flynn, 63)

This shows the societal pressure on women to always be perfect to be loved by men. This pressure from society by itself, can lead to anxiety in women. According to Betty Friedan:

“Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity.” (Friedan,44)

Camille’s reflection about the fact that if she was perfect, she could be married aligns with how Friedan describes the pressure society puts on women to be loved by men. The so-

cietal mindset that tells women to be perfect otherwise one is not loved is critiqued by Friedan in her *Feminine Mystique*. Camille's internal monologue represents that she knows she is not a perfect female according to societal norms, therefore she feels less self-worth and her self-confidence lowers. She goes to a bar in town again to have a drink to calm herself from all the pressure she feels. There she meets her mother's old friends that she describes as a *pack of housewives who know everything about everyone*. So, she decides to sit with them to be able to get some information from them. They talk about John Keene, Natalie's brother, the fact that he is handsome, and when they moved to Wind Gap, he got the attention of many girls in high school. After a while, he chooses Meredith as his girlfriend. But Meredith has a story, she is the daughter of Adora's best friend, the kind of mom whose kid cannot do anything wrong, therefore the girl was a virgin up to that age. They claimed that because John is a handsome guy there is no way he would accept a virgin, and therefore they are sure now that this girl has a sexual relationship with him. This part offers an illustration of societal standards of femininity and the pressures it puts on women. The conversation represents a small town's social hierarchy which leads to putting so much emphasis on femininity, virginity, relationships, and attaining a suitable partner for life. It shows the town where Camille comes from, is still thinking based on traditional gender roles and outdated societal expectations putting women of the town under lots of pressure. A woman's value is still counted by her virginity and purity, and how dedicated she is to familial and social expectations.

According to Betty Friedan, these types of societies are suffering from feminine mystique. She describes these societies as those in which the highest value and commitment for women is fulfilling their femininity. They put these beliefs in their people's minds that accepting the feminine nature as it is, will make women superior to men. In such societies when a woman tries to be her real self without considering the traditions and societal expectations, they believe that she has gone the wrong way and consider it as a flaw. Betty Friedan introduced feminine nature as these societies believed to be as:

“Sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love.” (Friedan,70)

Camille claims that she feels weightless since she knows nothing about her past. She does not know who her father is, or why her relationship with her mother is so ruined, she is looking for a way to find something in common between her and Adora to feel attached to someone; to be able to get along better with her identity. She describes how jealous she

was of her friends when she saw how their mothers cared for them:³²

The absence of a basic paternal figure in Camille's life, and her destructive relationship with her mother, show the fact that she faced lots of traumas coming from emotional neglect by her caregivers. This neglect leads her to feel an identity crisis, struggling to understand her worth in the family and society for years. This self-perception issue existed in Camille since childhood. Sigmund Freud (1966)³³ stated that if a child is abandoned or feels neglected by their mother, they grow up with difficulties in their internal life. He says:

“If a mother is absent or has withdrawn her love from her child, [the child] is no longer sure of the satisfaction of its needs and is perhaps exposed to the most distressing feelings of tension.” (Freud, 551)

The relationship between Camille and her mother can be seen as the one Freud describes. Adora withheld her love and affection from Camille since her childhood, which had a profound impact on her psychological development and mental health. Her cruel behaviors and bad memories which she remembers put her in conflict with her internal life, self-esteem, and identity. She never told her who her father was, which led her to lose half of her identity, and losing the other part was because Adora never loved her. Growing up with a parent who is emotionally detached and physically absent, just like Adora, will leave lasting emotional scars on a person's identity and life, neurosis, and identity crisis. There is another scene in the novel where Camille realizes Amma has serious psychological problems too, where she follows her to the pig farm, which is somewhere weird for a teenager to go. There she stands behind a barn in order not to be seen by Amma to realize what she is doing there. She sees a violent scene where the piglets are fighting aggressively over their mother's nipples, and Amma is looking at the scene smiling like she is enjoying that aggressive fight. Camille cannot stand the scene and her sister, so she runs away from the farm. This may metaphorically show the girls' fight over their mother's affection. Amma is the one who desires her mother's full attention and affection, and due to this neurotic need for affection, power, and approval from Adora, she is ready to gain what she wants at any cost;

³² As a child, I don't remember ever telling Adora my favourite colour, or what I'd like to name my daughter when I grew up. I don't think she ever knew my favourite dish, and I certainly never padded down to her room in the early morning hours, teary from nightmares. I always feel sad for the girl that I was, because it never occurred to me that my mother might comfort me. She has never told me she loved me, and I never assumed she did. She tended to me. She administrated me. Oh, yes, and one time she bought me lotion with vitamin E. (Flynn, 84)

³³ Sigmund, Freud. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol.14, 1966, p.551.

however, Camille is the weaker one who cannot stand this toxicity and runs away from it. It can be analyzed in a second way according to Horney's theory of neurotic personalities. Amma is the neurotic character who moves against people, and Camille is the type of neurotic who prefers to get away from people. After getting away from that scene, Camille decides to pull herself together once again and go talk to Natalie's family. There is Natalie's house, she is standing with Natalie's mother who does not seem to be so happy to have Camille there as a reporter. Camille thinks:

"A woman is less likely to throw you out if she's offered her hospitality. If you have allergies or a cold, asking for a tissue is even better. Women love vulnerability. Most women." (Flynn, 88)

The society Camille was raised in is the society Betty Friedan critiques. She thought that the fact that women enjoy doing lots of housework and linger the time for every task in the house is because they cannot function in society. They are not allowed, not given the chance, or have been told they cannot do anything but the domestic responsibilities, therefore, to be useful and productive during the day, they do lots of housework. She says: "The more a woman is deprived of function in the society at the level of her ability, the more her housework, mother-work, wife-work, will expand. And the more she will resist finishing her housework, or mother-work, and being without any function at all." (Friedan, 260)

Camille says if you ask a woman to do housework for you, she will enjoy it and it is because she feels useful and that is what she believes she can do the best. When she says most women like vulnerability, she is saying women believe to be functioning when they are doing housework and most of them believe in the feminine mystique and live with it, therefore changing their minds will be a difficult task. After Natalie's mom asks her to leave without answering her questions, Camille goes to a bar to meet Richard again. There she falls in a real challenge when Richard starts asking her about the most violent incidents she has ever seen, specifically in Wind Gap and she starts remembering all her traumas and telling them to him as if they have happened to people whom she doesn't know. She starts by telling the memory of when her mom bit a baby when the baby's mom was not around, to make her cry and she saw the scene, the second thing she remembers is when some boys from her high school caught her and made her put a stick in herself. When she says this, Richard asks her if this is against the girl's will and Camille replies "I guess so!". Then she says after the teacher found out what happened everyone must have apologized, also the girl, because: "Young ladies must be in control of their bodies, because boys are not." (Flynn, 94) This part of the novel

reveals gender bullying and how negligent the authorities were in response to it. The fact that boys treated her not as a human, but as an object of amusement shows that misogyny and patriarchy exist in their small community which gives hard time to women of the town. This passage reflects that power imbalance between genders is common in Wind Gap even from a young age between schoolboys and girls. After their teacher finds out, she forces Camille to apologize to the class, making her embarrassed about her femininity and full of shame from being victimized. The problematic situation of blaming the victim is usually something common in patriarchal societies which makes women ashamed of their bodies, femininity, and consequently passive beings in defending their rights. Camille vividly remembers what the teacher told her about controlling her body since it is an unfair issue and has given a very hard time to her since childhood. These kinds of sayings may change a girl's self-image and make her hateful of her body, sexuality, and femininity. Karen Horney, in her book *Feminine Psychology*, states how these ways of talking about men and showing them as superior in society may affect a woman's attitude about herself and her sexuality for her whole life. She says:

“Such an unconscious attitude of envy renders the woman blind to her own virtues. Everything is measured against the masculine_ that is, by a yardstick intrinsically alien to her_ and therefore she easily perceives herself as insufficient.” (Horney, 75)

The conversation she has in the bar with Richard shows how traumatized and victimized she is. She says to Richard that once in high school some boys took her to a place in the woods and had sex with her one by one, but she is not sure whether it counts as outright violence or not. Richard is surprised to see how unaware she is of her rights as a woman in Wind Gap since all her problems have been neglected by the patriarchal society she was born. At the same time, Camille feels offended seeing his reaction and states that women do not need to be looked after all the time and how she hates these attitudes of liberal men counting every phenomenon as a gender discrimination issue. When Richard asks her if she had a close relationship with her mother, she continues with: “I think some women aren't made to be mothers, and some women aren't made to be daughters.” (Flynn, 97)

Camille is invited to the house of her old friend from school, Katie. She decides to go against her will to be able to find some information regarding the murders. Her friend is a pregnant woman with her third baby, a typical feminine life, and is going to try having more babies until she finally can have a boy. There she meets her other friends, gossiping and weeping over how their husbands mess with them around having more babies because they

want to be mothers to more babies. One of them says: “What is wrong with being just a mommy?” (Flynn, 113) Then they start blaming Camille for not feeling as sad as they do for the murder of Ann and Natalie. They accuse her of not being so sad just because she does not have any kids of her own. Tish says: “Part of your heart can never work if you don’t have kids. Like it will always be shut off.” (Flynn, 115) then the other friend, Katie agrees with her and says:

“I never really become a woman until I felt McKenzie inside me... The Bible says be fruitful and multiply, and science, well, when it all boils down, that’s what women were made for, right? To bear children.” (Flynn, 115)

This is an example of the feminine mystique, which Friedan considers as a problem of many women. In her book, she delves into the deep unhappiness women feel because of the societal pressures on them. The feminine mystique she talks about is the traditional thought that women find happiness and salvation only through becoming wives and mothers and working in society is not what they are made for. A problem she faces is how some women, like Camille’s high school friends, believe this mystique and fall into its trap forever, leading them later to problems such as identity crisis, depression, etc. In her book, she says:

“If the secret of feminine fulfillment is having children, never have so many women, with freedom to choose, had so many children, in so few years, so willingly. If the answer is love, never have women searched for love with such determination.” (Friedan, 57)

The next part is another climax that represents why Camille is so traumatic in her life. She goes back home and Adora asks her to come and have a drink with her. There she confesses to Camille for the first time after all these years: “I think I finally realized why I don’t love you.” (Flynn, 126) Camille is not so shocked to hear this since she has always seen this in her mother’s behavior, however, she never had confessed like this. She explains to her that the reason why she doesn’t love her is because she reminds her of Joya, her mother. How she was cold with her as well and did not love her just like she does not like Camille. Camille’s response to her mother, saying “I learned all these at your feet” shows the kind of defense mechanism she chooses to get along with this traumatic moment where finally she realizes her mom never loved her. The fact that Adora says I do not love you because my mother did not love me as well can be a sign of generational trauma in the family. Here, the most important reason for Camille’s neurotic life is revealed because Karen Horney also emphasized maternal love since childhood and how it can influence the whole character and identity of an individual even when they become adults. Camille’s mother told her that all her life she

thought that Camille did not love her as well and wanted to punish her for her existence. Adora has a domineering mind, and that is the reason why when even she was a baby, she needed her to do exactly as she wanted her to do. Karen Horney says:

“A domineering mother feeling resentment about a child’s disobedience will believe, and declare, that the child does not love her.” (Horney, 170)

Therefore, Adora is a domineering mother, probably because she confesses, she was treated the same way by her mother, Joya. The next morning Camille experiences a panic attack quietly in the house. At some point, Camille and Richard end up having some sexual touches in the woods. The next time, Camille goes to his place, and he asks Camille to talk about her first intercourse experience and if she had an orgasm. Camille thinks about the first time, and how those schoolboys raped her that day, a very traumatic experience for her that she is embarrassed to talk about, therefore she starts inventing another story, that she was sixteen and it was with a football player there. When they want to have sex, she asks Richard to have it with her clothes on, because she doesn’t want him to see her scars. Meanwhile, four words were coming to her mind: *Trash, pump, little, girl*. These four words that constantly pass her mind during sex represent her self-perception and internalization of negative judgments. It shows a judgmental internal voice in her that comes up when she has physical intimacy with somebody because of her traumatic experiences in the past when she was younger. After that experience, she has a moment of loneliness with her thinking:

“I couldn’t decide if I’d been mistreated. By Richard, by those boys who took my virginity, by anyone. I was never really on my side in any argument. I liked the Old Testament spitefulness of the phrase got what she deserved. Sometimes women do.” (Flynn, 147)

Just like Betty Friedan explains in her book, Camille believes that she deserves to be humiliated by men sometimes. Friedan says that women have been conditioned to accept a limited, subservient role in society, unaware of the possibility that they can have more or deserve better. Her internalization of blame and questioning whether she’s been mistreated or not are consequences of living in a society that does not believe in gender equality and empowers males over females, besides victimizing them. That night was not over right there. Camille saw Amma and her friends on her way and they asked her to go to a party with them. She agreed to go because she did not want to go home and see her mom once again. There, she started to know Amma better, and how traumatized she was just like her, they started becoming close as sisters and talking about Adora. Camille realized that Amma feels the same about Adora because she told

her that Adora does not love her as well, she hates her too, but in a different way. This meeting with Amma was a turning point for Camille, because for the first time, she became close friends with someone except for her dead sister, and she confessed that it had been a long time since she had felt this amount of happiness. They drank lots of alcohol and took many pills and drugs that night, they both felt extremely bad the next morning. Camille saw her mother's affection once again this time, she knew that Amma was lying that they were having food poisoning, but she acted like she had believed because there was one thing that gave lots of satisfaction to her, giving medicine to her sick kids. Camille says:

“I remember being a kid, rejecting all those tablets and medicines, and losing her by doing so.” (Flynn, 164)

She is worried about Amma, so she goes to her room to see if she's ok, but she sees Amma in the same situation. Amma asks Camille what color pill Adora gave her and she says blue. Amma says that the blue one is her favorite. There Camille realizes that Adora gives lots of pills to Amma just like she gave to Marian. She knows that it should be on purpose because Amma is not sick if Marian was at all. Then some sentences are repeated in her mind: *My mother killed Marian. My mother killed those little girls.* She decides to get out of the house to find a way to save her sister and herself. She drives to Jackie's house, her mom's former best friend.

There she meets one of the women of the town, Geri Shilt, who is a maid in Jackie's house. She is surprised because she didn't know she worked for Jackie. She thinks to herself:³⁴

Here, Camille depicts Wind Gap and the women living there. She says that there is a pattern of life for women here, those who are pretty girls in society are married, having kids, and doing nothing special, and those who are ugly work for the pretty ones and are abused by them. According to what she states both categories are victimized in different ways. She introduces Wind Gap as a society in which women are entrapped in their domestic, social roles. She describes that they are stuck in an endless loop and cannot drag themselves out. There is

³⁴ Those who remained here were still just as segregated as before. Petty, pretty girls like Katie Lacey who now lived, predictably, in a rehabbed Victorian a few blocks from us, played at the same Woodberry tennis club as Adora, made the same quarterly pilgrimage to St. Louis for shopping. And the ugly, victimized girls like Geri Shilt were still stuck cleaning up after the pretty ones, heads lowered glumly, waiting for more abuse. They were women not strong enough or smart enough to leave. Women without imagination. So, they stayed in Wind Gap and played their teenage lives on an endless loop. And now I was stuck with them, unable to pull myself out. (Flynn, 168)

no opportunity for progression for women in this place. This society is the idea of Betty Friedan of what she called the feminine mystique. In the house, Jackie asks Camille if she wants some painkillers because she has lots of them and she thinks they are fun, this is another sign of victimization of women in the society. She says to Camille that Joya, her grandmother, was also mentally ill like Adora and this is no surprise. The only advice she can give Camille is to ask her to leave Wind Gap for good. She comes out of the house wondering if her mother, Marian, Amma, and she have been really sick all those moments and were given pills. She says:³⁵

Betty Friedan states that the chronic fatigue and pain in women are brought on by the repetition of their jobs and their roles in society, staying in their house for long hours doing house chores, and the isolation and loneliness they feel which in the long-term make them anxious and depressed as well. She says:

“It is the mystique of feminine fulfilment, and the immaturity it breeds, that prevents women from doing the work of which they are capable.” (Friedan, 273)

Friedan in this part speaks about the way societies can make women passive and victimized making them believe that this is the best life they can live to fulfil their femininity in their families and societies, and this prevents women from living a mature life, just like Camille said in the book that in a society like Wind Gap women are trapped in a loop of living a teenage life they had. Camille decides to go to the hospital where Marian died to ask for her files and her medical reports after all these years. When they gave her the file, she found what she needed to know all these years, a letter from a nurse in the file:³⁶

This is like a confession letter to Camille that reveals everything she needs to know.

³⁵ I have known so many sick women all my life. Women with chronic pain, with ever-gestating disease. Women with conditions. Men, sure, they have bone snaps, they have backaches, they have a surgery or two, yank out a tonsil, insert a shiny plastic hip. Women get consumed. Not surprising, considering the sheer amount of traffic a woman's body experiences. Tampons and speculums. Cocks, fingers, vibrators and more, between the legs, from behind, in the mouth. Men love to put things inside women, don't they? Cucumbers and bananas and bottles, a string of pearls, a Magic Marker, a fist. Once a guy wanted to wedge a Walkie-Talkie inside of me. I declined. (Flynn,173)

³⁶ I am a nurse who has attended Marian Crellin for her tests this week, as well as several previous in-patient stays. I am of the very strong [“very strong” underlined twice] opinion that this child is not sick at all. I believe were it not for her mother, she would be perfectly healthy. The child exhibits signs of illness after spending time alone with the mother, even on days when she has felt well up until maternal visits. Mother shows no interest in Marian when she is well, in fact, seems to punish her. Mother holds child only when she is sick or crying. I and several other nurses, who for political reasons choose not to sign their names to my statement, strongly believe the child, as well as her sister, should be removed from the home for further observation. (Flynn, 191)

Now she is quite sure that Adora has killed Marian, Anne, and Natalie. She decides to refer to the nurse to realize the truth behind everything. She tells her that Adora is suffering from Munchausen by Proxy, and this is not allowed to be spoken of because she is a mother, and she can be fired talking about this. Then she turned to Richard, who knew about this. They talked about this for a while and Richard told her she did not know how she could tell her about all this. He told her he thought that the murderer was a woman who hated to see strength in women. She tried to take care of them and take control, and when they rejected her, she started to strangle them and think that they had to die. That night, Camille went home and the day after her mom was arrested by the police.

3.3. Adora and MBP Syndrome: a Victim Daughter Becomes a Mother Monster

Adora is one of the most interesting characters of the novel, and the most mysterious one. In the patriarchal town where they live, she is the matriarch of the family who controls and manipulates her children, her husband, society, and her friends. She is a prominent figure in Wind Gap because of her family's social status. She is aware of her position in the community, which is one of the reasons she cares about participating in social gatherings in the town with a great appearance and keeping her family's name in people's memories. Her obsession with keeping their name is not only because of fame but also because she uses her name and position to control others and have power over them. Her past so influences her behavior and personality, most importantly her relationship with her mother, Joya, who was an abusive mother to her. Her destructive relationship with her mother made her believe that love and affection should be conditional and earned through pain and sickness. Her marriage to Alan is another aspect of her life that influenced her character a lot. Their relationship is kept for social expectations rather than for the sake of love. Camille in her stories often introduces Alan as an indifferent person who does not say or do anything to confront his wife.

3.3.1. Mental Illnesses and Motivations

Adora suffers from MBP, Munchausen by Proxy syndrome, which is a mental illness that makes the parent fabricate, exaggerate, or induce illnesses in their children to gain attention, or sympathy from the others. The most important sign in Adora is her second daughter, Marian, who was killed after several weeks in hospital without the others realizing the reason

she died. In the book, Camille says:³⁷

Adora's attention and affection for her children are dependent on their health status and her caretaking role. To shift the attention from Camille to Marian, who was so sick at that time, is a sign of MBP in her. Camille's resistance to taking her mother's pills and medicine and the fact that she is aware of losing her attention after that, are signs which prove their relationship was so conditional and complex. Dr. Emily Andrews, in her book *Munchausen Syndrome*³⁸, explains the motivations behind this fabrication of disease by these people. She says the main reason behind this fabrication is psychological distress and unresolved traumas that exist in the individual's life. They may come from deep feelings of inadequacy, rejection, abuse, trauma, or abandonment. So, by fabricating the disease and attracting sympathy they show a defense mechanism to reach that respect and care they deeply wish for. She believes that social factors play important roles in developing MBP. [Andrews, 9-11]. In this story, the societal factors could be the expectations a society has from a mother, to care for her baby a lot, and to be so sympathetic when the child is ill. Childhood experiences cannot be neglected in developing this disorder. The memory Adora has of her mother leaving her in the woods when she was eight, or all the other abusive stories the others told Camille about Joya could be strong motifs to develop this disorder in her. In the book, Dr. Andrews says:

“The caregiving burden placed upon loved ones of individuals with MBP can be overwhelming.” (Andrews, 23)

She further explains that the reason for this feeling is that they must play the victim for these people all the time to make them happy as the caretakers. Camille has lots of bad memories of Adora that she remembers in detail because they traumatized her all her life, but one thing she says she never forgets is when her mother hurt a baby, and she was the only one seeing it. She says after Marian's death, some of her mother's friends came to visit and one of them had a baby. Adora cuddles the baby pretending that she is feeling a bit of joy after her loss, so everyone gives her some space with the baby. Camille says:

“I remember my mother, alone in the living room, staring at the child almost lasciviously. She pressed her lips hard against the baby's apple slice of a cheek. Then she opened

³⁷ When I was a child, I remember my mother trying to prod me with ointments and oils, homemade remedies and homeopathic nonsense. I sometimes took the foul solutions, more often refused. Then Marian got sick, really sick, and Adora had more important things to do than coaxing me into swallowing wheatgerm extract. Now I had a pang: all those syrups and tablets she proffered, and I rejected. That was the last time I had her full attention as a mother. I suddenly wished I'd been easier. (Flynn, 52)

³⁸ Emily, Andrews. *Munchausen Syndrome: Understanding, Healing and Breaking the Cycle*. New York: Health Publications, 2020.

her mouth just slightly, took a tiny bit of flesh between her teeth, and gave it a little bite.” (Flynn, 84)

The fact that Adora tended to harm others in a motherly way shows her traumatic life dependent on her mother, Joya. She not only applies her MBP to her daughters but also to other people’s kids. Jackie, Adora’s best friend, told Camille that her mom had lots of mother-daughter traumas just like her. She said Joya was overprotective and had lots of abusive behaviors, for example, she used to lick Adora’s skin while she was naked in front of them. There was generational abuse in this family. This act of licking Adora’s skin shows that in her mother’s behavior, there was no separation between giving love to the child and harming her. Then she said that she believed these behaviors she has now are the consequences of that relationship with Joya. She told Camille:

“Adora devours you, and if you don’t let her, it’ll be even worse for you. Look at what’s happening to Amma. Look at what happened to Marian.” (Flynn,172)

But at some point, when she confessed to Camille that she did not love her and it was because of her relationship with her mother, it turned out that she had as traumatic a past as Camille had. She told Camille that Joya used to take her to the woods and leave her alone there. This is a turning point in the novel when the perpetrator of the story seems to be a victim as well. Then she says:

“When a child knows that young that her mother doesn’t care for her, bad things happen.” (Flynn,199)

Sigmund Freud believed that for a person to have a normal life, she needs to get the affection and attention she needs in life from her parents, especially the mother. If in any case, it does not happen to her, it leaves behind a “permanent injury” which will be a sense of inferiority. [156-157] That sense of inferiority is seen in Adora, and then in Camille. At the end of the story, Adora’s arrest is not only the most important part of the novel, but also a profound commentary on the intricate familial bonds, hidden violence in the family, and the paradox of maternal affection. This moment also shows how the deepest secrets in a family can be influential in the household and society.

3.3.2. Amma and Competitiveness: Neurotic Needs for Power, Control, and Affection

Like Camille and Marian, Amma is another daughter of the family and a victim of Adora’s MBP and other mental disorders. She presents a dichotomy throughout the novel because

she has both the innocence of childhood and the hostility, and malice of a neurotic adult. In the first encounter with Camille, she looks like a child with clothes she wears in the house, but when she notices that Camille is looking at her strangely, she says:

“I wear this for Adora. When I’m home, I’m her little doll.” (Flynn, 38)

This shows that she is fully aware of the role she is playing for Adora to gain her attention and be loved by her. This innocence she shows when Adora is around is carefully constructed to manipulate Adora. Amma’s neurotic need for affection and attention can be analyzed through Karen Horney’s theory of neurotic needs. In her book, she says these people with neurotic need for affection, are always looking for reassurance that they are loved to the extent that they forget about love itself. They are ready to do whatever people want to just get that reassurance they want from them to cope with their anxiety. She adds that:

“They may be aroused by erotic or sexual advances, although these may have nothing to do with love.” (Horney, 110)

Also, in the novel Amma tells Camille that is strange for her that every time Adora shows affection to her, she needs to have sex after that. This behavior shows how neurotic and toxic the mother-daughter relationship between the two is. Another problem is that although Adora shows lots of affection to Amma, it seems that it is never enough for her, and she cannot believe it. She keeps asking Adora if she loves Camille more than her and when she says no, she still does not believe her. Or she confesses to Camille that Adora does not love her, but she hates her differently. She once asked Camille if she could be in a fairy tale, and Camille was speechless. However, Amma answered that she’d be Persephone, and when they asked her why she answered:³⁹

By comparing herself to Persephone, Amma reveals her anxiety due to living with two different characters. She lives a dual life like Persephone. This division creates in her a drive into neurosis and what Karen Horney believes to be the gap between the real self and the idealized self. Amma must constantly create an idealized self of her who is lovable and acceptable to her mother and her peers in society. She feels so misunderstood and is an alienated character because of the dual life she lives. The way she pities Persephone can be a sign of a moment of self-perception and how lonely she feels to be in her both lives because she

³⁹ She’s the Queen of Dead. She was so beautiful; Hades stole her and took her to the underworld to be his wife. But her mother was so fierce, she forced Hades to give Persephone back. But only for six months each year. So, she spends half her life with the dead, and half with the living...I feel sorry for Persephone because even when she’s back with the living, people are afraid of her because of where’s she’s been, and even when she’s with her mother, she’s not happy, because she knows she’ll have to go back underground. (Flynn, 198)

doesn't feel she belongs to either of them. Karen Horney states that one of the characteristics of people with the neurotic need for affection is that getting this affection is vitally necessary for them, so:

“The neurotic will pay any price for it, mostly without realizing that he is doing so.”
(Horney, 119)

Amma asks Camille once how dangerous this can be when somebody enjoys hurting others because it feels so good to her, Camille ignores the question, but the reality of the murders is behind this question. It seems to Camille that Amma can never get enough affection from anybody. Although she is so bossy with her friends, and they obey her a lot she tells Camille:

“They do whatever I tell them. But they don't like me. The second I fuck up, the second I do something uncool; they'll be the first to gang up against me. Sometimes I sit in my room before bed, and I write down every single thing I did and said that day. Then I grade it, A for a perfect move, F for I should kill myself I'm such a loser.” (Flynn, 155)

She also thinks that by letting people hurt her sometimes, she gets satisfaction because she knows that at least she has the attention she wants from them now.

“Sometimes if you let people do things to you, you're really doing it to them.”
(Flynn,155)

The other characteristic Horney introduces about these neurotic people is their greediness. She declares that these people distrust themselves and rely on others to create things for them, and they rely on the outside world for the fulfillment of their needs. A good example of this in the novel is Amma's doll house which she believes is never perfect. In the story, as Camille says every time Amma is creating something in the doll house, Adora is there to help her. The dollhouse is a replica of their house, that was presented to Amma by Adora. A good way for Amma to have the affection of her mother. On the surface, it may represent an innocent child's activity. However, it is the secret hidden in the family, the toxic atmosphere of the family, and the mental disorders of Amma. At the end of the story, the dollhouse uncovers the truth about the murders in the town. It contains a hidden floor which is made of human teeth, Anne and Natalie's teeth. Just like their real house, the doll house seemed to be a perfect house within it so many ugly things were hidden. Camille says about the moment she found the teeth in the dollhouse:

“I swept out the contents of the dollhouse room by room, smashing my little four-

poster bed, Amma's day bed, the lemon-yellow love seat. Once I'd flung out my mother's big brass canopy and destroyed her vanity table, either Amma or I screamed. Maybe both of us did. The floor of my mother's room. The beautiful ivory tiles. Made of human teeth. Fifty-six tiny teeth, cleaned and bleached and shining from the floor." (Flynn, 207)

Camille realizes that Amma has killed all those girls. She is so shocked to realize this, so she goes straight to Amma to understand the truth. The way she killed the girls was just like James Capisi described, she wore a white gown to look like a Greek Goddess, Artemis, the blood huntress. Then she killed Lily, the girl whom she befriended in Chicago, and she braided her hair for the rug in Camille's room in the doll house. After she goes to prison, Camille visits her once and she asks about the reason why she killed those innocent girls. Amma replied: "I was friends with them for a while. We had fun, running around in the woods. We were wild. We'd hurt things together. We killed a cat once. But then she — got all interested in them. I could never have anything to myself. They weren't my secrets anymore. They were always coming by the house. They started asking me questions about being sick. They were going to ruin everything. She didn't even realize it. And why did Ann have to bite...her? I couldn't stop thinking about it. Why Ann could bite her, and I couldn't." (Flynn, 210) Camille thinks that the reason she killed those girls is because she thought that Adora loves them more, and the reason she killed Lily in Chicago is because she suspected that Camille loved her more, so the same pattern of behavior was constantly repeated in Amma.

4. Forms of Representation: How Female Victimization is Represented in Literature and Movies/Series

With time, representing women in media has changed a lot. Societal norms are shaped by the intersectionality between gender, culture, and media. One of the most important topics of this intersectionality is female victimization and its portrayal in media and society, it is a theme deeply intertwined with societal expectations which is manifested through many platforms such as literature and cinema. These media platforms reflect society's situation and provide profound insights to their audiences, who are also integral members of society. Female characters in literary works or films are usually portrayed according to gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles of that society. This portrayal not only harms women, particularly the victims of violence but also perpetuates damaging societal norms and views

on gender roles. The alignment between media representations and societal norms underscores the importance of challenging such norms to have a society with more gender equality. Professor Liesbet Van Zoonen, a professor of sociology at University of Rotterdam, has written a valuable book called *Feminist Media Studies*⁴⁰. In her book, she meticulously analyses women as a part of the media representation. In a part of the book, she says:⁴¹

Such underrepresentation can result in destructive public perceptions about female victimization issues in society. The way fulfillment in society is measured with consumerism leads to measuring women's success with materialism and the approval of the other members. This viewpoint can be harmful to their victimization by making them believe that surviving these types of victimization is achievable through consumerism rather than through justice and societal reforms. Therefore, Zoonen emphasizes that it is necessary for the media to completely understand and reflect the real-life situations of women, before portraying them in their platforms. They should foster a representation that is both truthful and empowering, rather than a representation that is more about societal stereotypes.

4.1. Historical Evolution of Female Representation

To understand female victimization in media better, it is important to gain knowledge about societal and cultural shifts that led to changes in media narratives through the years. During the era of silent film and early literature, female characters were represented as innocent, pure, and virtuous characters. When they had difficulties in their narrative, they were typically portrayed as “damsels in distress”, who relied on men to solve their problems. This portrayal has its roots in medieval romances, and it also persisted in the Victorian era and after. Characters such as Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*⁴² can be an example. These characters were overwhelmed with personal, familial, and societal dilemmas from which they could not save themselves and they were waiting for a male's assistance. The cultural idealization of female purity and vulnerability was a very important theme at that time. They were not merely artistic creations but reflections of societal values and norms. These

⁴⁰ L. Van Zoonen, *Feminist Media Studies*, London, SAGE Publications, 1994.

⁴¹ Distortion is a key concept in many feminist approaches to the media. It is often said that women are underrepresented in media content when compared to the 50 percent of the population which they constituted. Alternatively, it is argued that in reality many more women work than we get to see or read about in media content. Another argument deals with the definition of femininity presented to us in media content: submission, availability, and compliance are characteristics held up as ideals, and consumption is presented as the road to fulfilment. (Zoonen, 30)

⁴² Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act VI, Scene VII.

representations put pressure on women saying that they should have these traits in society and measure their worth with the rate of their purity and vulnerability. The identity of women was tied to these prescribed traits and strong women were not accepted in society as much as those who became dependent on men were.

Throughout the late 19th century to 1920s, the silent film era portrayed women as “damsels in distress”. They narrated the stories of these women’s lives with visual storytelling and archetypal characters that represented females as victims of situations that needed a man to rescue them. It was not only because of traditional gender role beliefs but also because these stories needed the dichotomy between the good and the evil, the good characters were always women who were presented with their innocence and purity. An example of this genre is *The Perils of Pauline*⁴³, a 1914 film in which Pauline, the protagonist, epitomizes the damsel in distress archetype with the dangers which she needs to be saved from. As time went by, these representations started to arouse women’s criticism and some of them believed that these pictures of women in media are not universally accepted. The late 19th and early 20th centuries marked the beginning of some feminist movements, which began to challenge these narratives as well. Therefore, female characters started to evolve to be more autonomous in later representations.

4.2. Influential Theories on These Changes in Representation

With the emergence of feminist movements, the approaches of literature, cinema, and other types of media began to change. This change also led to the emergence of new feminist figures who started to critique the previous theoretical viewpoints related to women. Karen Horney also critiques the way female victimization is represented in media, which focuses on the biological difference and represents women as some victimizations are unavoidable to be done to them because they are females. She believed that society itself could foster neurotic behaviors. The movie *Gone Girl* and the mini-series *Sharp Objects* show the insanity that happens in society and will be transferred to the members. Both happen in a society obsessed with perfection, especially about female characters. The controlling attitudes towards women in society lead them to psychological disorders. An example in *Gone Girl* can be Amy’s depiction of her idealized image due to the expectations of her parents and the public from her because of the Amazing Amy books her parents wrote. The pressure and the need to become her fictional, idealized self makes her control and manipulate the people around her

⁴³ *The Perils of Pauline*, Directed by Louis J. Gasnier and Donald MacKenzie, 1914.

and then the society, to be accepted by them the way she needs neurotically. Her neurotic need for attention leads to her fake disappearance and disturbance of her marriage and personal life. The film starts with a close-up of Amy's head on Nick's chest, with his hands touching her hair. Amy's voiceover questions what she is thinking and whether he is contemplating her skull, which is a symbol of the need to control and manipulate other minds. Nick's internal monologue about Amy's thoughts, while he touches her hair, shows his deep-seated insecurity and the need for validation. Her anxiety is revealed by the primary close-up scene. Amy's direct gaze at Nick in the opening scene signifies her awareness and the manipulative thoughts she has in mind. This scene introduces the audience to the underlying tensions in Amy and Nick's married life. Also in *Sharp Objects*, flashbacks, fragmented narrative, and eerie represent Camille's traumatic past and disturbed mental state. The series begins with Camille dreaming about her childhood, wandering through Wind Gap, her hometown, and the encounter of her young self with her adult self. This opening represents her struggles with trauma and self-conflicts.

As more scholars began to bring up feminist perspectives like those of Horney, a transformation occurred in literature and cinema. The concept of victimization was detangled from women's identity and instead, such scenarios were portrayed as pivotal moments to show women's strength and autonomy. This narrative structure marked a very important change in representing female victimization. Through these changes, media began to reflect and contribute to broader societal shifts towards recognizing and affirming the full humanity and potential of women. Portraying women as strong, independent characters who can overcome the difficulties of life by themselves, media representations influenced the public's perceptions in many ways about gender inequalities and traditional beliefs, thereby contributing to a better situation in society related to gender roles.

In her *Feminine Psychology*, Karen Horney explains how societal values are in major part masculine, with men holding the most important positions of power and authority in society. As a result, women are deprived of many privileges not only because of their biological differences but also because men have established rules in a way that is more aligned with their needs rather than women's. Horney believed that in such patriarchal societies when a woman is capable enough to take responsibility or have power, they should either conform to these masculine rules or will be excluded. This issue highlights the existence of societies with gender inequality. She critically addresses women who have accepted to conform to those masculine rules and adapt to the male-dominated way of ruling societies by claiming that

these changes are biological. She further continues by saying that this masculine power is not only restricted to societal norms but also extends to the field of psychology. Both societal and psychological frameworks are working in the direction of these gender biases rather than claiming that they are unreasonable disparities that need to be eliminated.

Another prominent feminist activist was Betty Friedan. Friedan's critique of this topic offered great insights to women of that time and led to great changes in media. By focusing on how women are represented in the media and how the reality is about them, Friedan reevaluated the society and media's representation of female sex and their victimization. After *The Feminine Mystique* was published, there was a noticeable shift in how women were represented in media. Films, novels, and television started to explore more themes of female independence and empowerment. Betty Friedan explains the influence of media on female representation in a way that focuses on the roles of women in society. She states how historical media representations that once described an ideal woman to be the one involved in domestic roles are now being redefined with the help of feminist activists and female scholars. She says that historically women's political and societal roles were ignored, and she gives an example: the first national conference devoted to the female writers of America in the 1800s. The interest and sophistication of these discussions were those which were unimaginable before. This shows how women's dedication and contributions to literature made a change that made them to be finally recognized and valued. And it was a completely contradictory situation when they were sharply neglected by the media and literature. She claims also how academic fields were made according to male perspectives and then points to the reassessment of male-centric historical narratives and exploring masculinity in a new way through the lens of feminist critiques. According to her, the media's role is very important in this reassessment because it shapes public perceptions and later academic focuses. (Betty Friedan, 28-30) She then criticized how advertisements had influenced female education years ago by putting pressure on them to conform to feminine roles from a young age. She continues by declaring that at the time when early marriages were promoted, like at the end of high school, magazines were starting to appreciate these marriages by promoting marriage counseling and education to support them. This implies that the media played a significant role at that time in normalizing young marriages which would make more women passive and without university education. She highlights how manufacturers targeted young girls with products like bras with false bosoms, pressuring them to be more sexual for men. These also aligned with societal expectations of the time to reinforce some beauty standards. She says:

“And an advertisement for a child’s dress, sizes 3–6x, in the New York Times in the fall of 1960, said: “She Too Can Join the Man-Trap Set.” (Friedan, 45)

This advertisement she describes, saying that a child’s dress can be attractive to men, explicitly sexualizes young children by comparing a young girl’s sexuality to an adult’s sexuality. This leads to harmful cultural norms encouraging young girls to feel not enough and compare themselves sexually with adults. She believes that this image created by the media of femininity extremely affects how women see themselves individually and socially. She identifies women’s magazines, books, television, movies, and advertisements as key constructors of this feminine image. Women, consciously or unconsciously, might want to follow these ideals that they will never get perfectly, and this leads to feelings of inadequacy in them. She later aligns the role of dreams in psychoanalysis with the role of media in society. Just as in psychoanalysis, dreams provide insights into unconscious and repressed desires, the images and stories supported by the media can give clues to societal norms and values. (Friedan, 62) She also explains that once she was in a woman magazine editor’s office and she heard something interesting from her:⁴⁴

This dialogue with the magazine editor reveals the mechanism through which societal expectations are perpetuated through media. Today, the media plays a dual role in challenging and reinforcing the concept of feminine mystique. Movies like *Gone Girl* by David Fincher, or *The Handmaid’s Tale* TV series, present more complex female characters navigating issues beyond their domestic sphere and not conforming to what society is willing to impose on them. These movies and novels directly challenge the feminine mystique issue and bring many women to self-awareness. In a scene in *Gone Girl* movie, Amy is describing the cool girl concept and how men view women as cool girls and exclude any other girl who is not one. This definition aligns with Betty Friedan’s definition of bringing up sexuality in women from a young age to make her an instrument of attraction for men. Amy’s monologue on the cool girl’s definition is:⁴⁵

⁴⁴ I found a clue one morning, sitting in the office of a women’s magazine editor—a woman who, older than I, remembers the days when the old image was being created, and who had watched it being displaced. The old image of the spirited career girl was largely created by writers and editors who were women, she told me. The new image of woman as housewife-mother has been largely created by writers and editors who are men. (Friedan, 80)

⁴⁵ Nick loved a girl I was pretending to be. ‘Cool Girl.’ Men always use that, don’t they, as their defining compliment? She’s a ‘Cool Girl.’ Cool Girl is hot. Cool Girl is game. Cool Girl is fun. Cool Girl never gets angry at her man. She only smiles in a chagrined, loving manner and then presents her mouth for fucking. She likes what he likes. So evidently, he’s a vinyl hipster who loves fetish manga. If he likes girls gone wild, she’s a cool girl. I used to see men — friends, co-workers, strangers — giddy over these awful pretender women, and

Betty Friedan also in her *Feminine Mystique* addresses the manipulation and objectification of women to meet male expectations, whether in media or real life. Amy describes how she changes herself to be the cool girl to attract her husband and men around her as friends, colleagues, etc. The cool girl she describes should be sexually attractive, aligned with male fantasies, and meet societal expectations rather than herself. Friedan criticizes society for putting women under pressure to meet these expectations and as Amy said, be the cool girls in society for men, she expands this discussion to media, advertisements, and movies. These women in media are often sexualized to be attractive to the male audience and this leads them to suppress their identities, just like Amy did for years. Friedan has also discussed the identity crisis women face when they must meet society's expectations. Amy also claims that she hates being a cool girl and her resentment over losing her true self.

4.3. Gender and Media Studies Framework

4.3.1. The Male Gaze

Laura Mulvey's concept called "the male gaze" suggests that films and narratives are usually made for male audiences and lead to objectification of female characters. Her "male gaze" revolutionized public's visual understanding of female representation in media. She introduced the concept in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"⁴⁶ in 1975. She claims that mainstream film revolves around a male gaze, to objectify women and make a visual understanding based on male perspective. She also incorporates into Freudian theories to represent how patriarchal society structures the forms of films. According to this view, watching films have two kinds of pleasures: one is voyeuristic experience, and the other is narcissistic. In the former one, the audience are seeing without being seen and in the latter the audience identify with the image which is seen by them. According to her, in classical Hollywood cinema, women are portrayed as visual objects of male desire. Their appearance is usually erotic to the eyes of men to represent the need to be looked at. Men are the most important characters and drivers of the narrative, and this makes them even more controlling towards women. She also introduces three different looks associated with cinema: one is the

I'd want to sit these men down and calmly say: 'You are not dating a woman, you are dating a woman who has watched too many movies written by socially awkward men who'd like to believe that this kind of woman exists and might kiss them.' I'd want to grab the poor guy by his lapels or messenger bag and say: 'The bitch doesn't really love chili dogs that much — no one loves chili dogs that much!' and the cool girls are even pretending to be the women they used to hate. I mean, you know, who doesn't like the 'cool girl'?

⁴⁶ L. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Vol. 16, No. 3, 1975.

look of the camera as it records the pro-filming event, the look of the audience because at the end they watch the final version, and third the looks of the characters at each other. (Mulvey, 6-18)

In *Gone Girl* movie, Amy's flashbacks represent her as a glamorous, fancy girl, highlighting her beauty and sexuality. The soft lighting, slow-motion shots, and close-ups emphasize her physical beauty, catering to the male gaze by objectifying her. There is a flashback of Amy at the Sugar Storm (28:00 – 30:00). In this scene, she recalls the early days of her relationship with Nick, specifically their first kiss at a Sugar Storm event. In the scene Amy is in a romantic light, emphasizing her beauty and her magical romance with Nick. The lighting creates a dream-like scene, slow-motion is used as a technique when they kiss each other amidst the falling sugar, highlighting an intimate moment. Prolonging the visual pleasure, this technique also highlights Rosamund Pike's feminine beauty and her role as Amy. Close-up shots of her beauty and body make her physical qualities the center of attention, aligning with the male gaze by presenting her as the object of desire. There are many similar scenes in the *Sharp Objects* series. One can be episode 2 of the series called "Dirt". In this episode, there is a scene in which Camille and Amma swim in the local pool. Amma is revealing her body to boys although she is at a young age, using close-ups and slow motions in this scene highlights her sexual beauty and youthfulness.

4.3.2. The Final Girl

Another concept, Carol J. Clover's "Final Girl", represents that in some films and novels women are the sole survivors at the end who confront the antagonist especially in thrillers or horror genres. This represents a departure from passive victimization. Her theory is pivotal in horror film analysis. She first introduced this concept in her book *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*⁴⁷ in 1992. Her concept extends Mulvey's male gaze as well. The final girl is usually more virtuous than the other characters, she believes that this image disrupts the traditional gender roles in cinema. Unlike the passive women seen through a male gaze, the final girl is usually an active character with some traits that are masculine such as aggression to win the usually male villain and survive at last. An interesting point is that movies with the final girl character make the audience relate more with the female character than the villain male. As time went by, this character started to be presented in the cinema and make societal changes in real life.

⁴⁷ C.J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, Princeton University Press, 1992.

The character of Amy Dunne in *Gone Girl* can be analyzed as a final girl and to analyze it this way is an unconventional twist because she both embodies and subverts the characteristics of the final girl. In the definition, the character survives many traumas and difficulties. Amy endures many traumatic events, however, some of them are not real and she uses them to manipulate the public. The act of framing her husband, the police, and the public about her disappearance shows the strategic way of thinking and the resilience of the final girl character who survives all the psychological and physical difficulties. The final girl in classical movies often is a high moral character, a quality which is not seen in Amy. She is violent, manipulative, and deceitful. This way, her character can be seen as a dark reflection of the final girl because the tactics she uses to survive are in contrast with the amount of morality she needs to have. Despite all the darkness she carries inside her, the effects of her husband, family, and society cannot be neglected in making her ruthless to the world. Another difference between the final girl and Amy in the movie is that she does not have only one antagonist to confront, but she decides to manipulate many characters, whether male or female, to be able to survive at the end of the story. Amy can have the audience's sympathy and identification, just like the final girl does. She takes the sympathy from the audience through her almost fake diary entries, which later turns out to the audience that they are fake, so the sympathy does not take so long to vanish. This makes her a fascinating modern reinterpretation of the final girl, as she not only manipulates the characters of the movie but also the audience's perceptions. In the end, Amy survives all these events and returns to her husband, making him stay with her and live with her ever after. She fits the final girl as the survivor of the story, although her survival is rooted in manipulative acts rather than her typical, real resilience. She redefines the boundaries of the final girl character, transforming the role to show the media representation and its influences on public perceptions. Amy is not just the final girl in case of her survival, she controls the whole narrative and the characters around her. The scene where Amy seduces and violently kills Desi, her ex-boyfriend, to survive and get back to her normal life is an example of what a final girl does in movies to survive at the end.

4.3.3. The Bechdel Test

This is introduced by Alice Bechdel in 1985 and in her comic strip called *Dykes to Watch Out For*⁴⁸ and is an active tool to evaluate the representation of women beyond their relationship with men in cinema. For example, if two female characters are speaking to each other about anything but men or not. This test shed light on the autonomy of women in narratives and cinema. Three criteria are the most important ones in this evaluation: One is the movie needs to have at least two female characters, two is these women need to talk to each other, and three is it must be anything except about men.

In the American TV series *Sharp Objects* (2018), which is based on the novel, the Bechdel test can work interestingly. There are multiple female characters in the series who are prominent in the story. The protagonist, Camille Preaker, her mother Adora, and her half-sister Amma are the most influential in the movie. These female characters have many interactions with each other and with other female characters as well. Camille has multiple interactions with her editor, also her mother, her sister, her mother's friends, her friends, and many other characters. These interactions influence the narrative and the most important which is related to the test is that they are not related to men, but rather about the murder cases and other issues like their personal traumas, societal issues, and family dynamics. The story is so important in showing dark themes and complex female characters, and this makes it a special example of the Bechdel test in the media's representation of female victimization. There are many examples in *Sharp Objects* that can be said to include in the Bechdel Test. In Episode 2 called *Dirt* when Camille and her mother are discussing Camille's traumatic past and traumas. They talk about Camille's mental health, her experiences with self-harm, and the tension they have in their mother-daughter relationship. In episode 5 called *Closer*, when Amma and her friends are seen interacting during various scenes, speaking about anything but men and boys. They discuss their activities, personal interests, and school.

4.4.Genre-Specific Analysis of Female Victimization

Knowing the difference between the forms of representation in different genres allows for more understanding of how gender and victimization are culturally constructed and understood within different contexts.

4.4.1.Drama

⁴⁸ A. Bechdel, *Dykes to Watch Out For*, 1985.

The dramatic genre often shows the depth of emotional involvement. They are mostly about a healing process or aftermath of victimization and explore the depth of psychological and social aspects of it. They are about issues like domestic abuse, toxic marital relationships, sexual assault, and traumas related to them to provoke empathy from the audience. There is this character of “victimized woman” that usually exists in such movies. The movie *Gone Girl* can be categorized as a drama. The movie delves into the psyche of its protagonist, Amy, who is a woman in a small society with lots of pressures on women. It also explores identity, experiences, marriage, and manipulation of media. This narrative of the marriage is the core characteristic of the dramatic genre itself. The movie tackles also realistic themes such as the problems of marriage, living in a small town, infidelity, and manipulation; the goal of the movie is to criticize society’s situation which is another characteristic of drama. Many dramas have a linear narrative, however, in “Gone Girl”, the narrative is non-linear one because it wants to present the motives and qualities of its characters gradually and not in a linear way.

In her seminal essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Sarah Mulvey talks about the representation of women in drama, and she says:

“Women, in the typical Hollywood film, bear a two-fold burden: their cinematic portrayal reflects the traditional exhibitionist role in which women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact.” (Mulvey, 6-18)

Her work has been influential in film studies and feminist discourse. Also, her text is an influential one in the field. She was the scholar who introduced the concept of the “male gaze”. She thought that men are often a major part of the narratives, while women are there only for visual attractions. Her concept was also a response to the way of thinking and making movies in the 1970s, saying that it is time for a new cinema to evolve and challenge these norms with narratives that consider gender roles and hope for equality. In *Gone Girl* and *Sharp Objects*, several scenes critique the male gaze concept like Amy’s monologues about cool girls, and Camille’s rejection of traditional femininity.

4.4.2.Horror

The horror genre objectifies the pain and suffering of characters especially women for the audience’s entertainment, using the image of the “final girl” a lot to confront the woman with the perpetrator at the end. It often delves into the character development which can cause one-dimensional portrayals of female victimization. In this genre, the final girl is often the object of extreme violence or the one that is stalked by the antagonist. The focus is on her

suffering and victimization and is vulnerable because of her gender. The narrative shows her survival through severe suffering. Women's value is shown through their resilience and ability to survive these violent scenes and their ability to endure pain and terror. In some movies, the final girl is sexualized through the male gaze, this intersects with her victimization. In horror movies, the final girl challenges the victimization by confronting and defeating the antagonist. If she survives in the end, there is a shift from being victimized to being victorious. Over time, this depiction has evolved. Modern representations of the final girl often provide the female character with more agency and power. They are defined by their actions rather than their victimization and resilience. By surviving and defeating the perpetrator, the final girl often shows that women are not the sole victims of society. This can be a criticism of the cinematic treatment of women.

Although *Gone Girl* and *Sharp Objects* are not directly categorized as horror movies, concerning the final girl and the survival scenes at the end they are almost the same. The traditional final girl survival scene is when she confronts the antagonist, shows moral purity and innocence, has physical and emotional resilience, and is always victorious at the end. In *Gone Girl*, the confrontation can be the one Amy has with Desi when she kills him in a manipulative manner. Her return to her husband, Nick, and forcing him to stay in the marriage by controlling him, is one of the characteristics of a traditional final girl as well. Her final victory is when she maintains control over her life through manipulation and power. In *Sharp Objects*, the confrontation can be when Camille finds out at the end that her sister is the true murderer of those girls. Her survival is more emotional rather than physical, she has familial dysfunction to cope with, and personal issues to tackle. The story ends when she knows her sister's true self and closes the cases, however, for her was not a victory.

4.4.3.Romance

Romantic narratives and films may romanticize or trivialize female victimization. Today modern romances have changed a lot and mostly represent women as powerful but before this victimization was portrayed as an obstacle to be overcome for love. The "rescue fantasy" which has been portrayed in many movies, cartoons, and novels is the opposite of gender equality. Victimization is a theme that helps the female character to be rescued by male characters and achieve their love. At the end of these romances, there is usually a happy ending which may simplify the issue of victimization.

As Tania Modleski states in her work *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women*⁴⁹, Romance films and novels constantly bring about the notion that women have no identity and are not complete without love. Every problem or concern they have in life will be solved only by a romantic relationship with a man. Her ultimate fulfillment in the work needs to be finding a suitable partner for herself and sticking to her life by doing domestic roles. For example, in the movie *Gone Girl*, everyone shows a bit of empathy for Nick Dunne, the husband, until they find out that Amy was pregnant at the time of disappearance. After that people start to become hostile and there is no empathy for him anymore, probably because a pregnant woman with no job except for her domestic roles has been so normal for that society and was regarded as a complete woman, therefore why would she decide to disappear out of nowhere unless the husband hated her or was trying to show violence against her. It was like after the public believed the way Amy manipulated them by faking the pregnancy, Amy was nothing to them but a victim of domestic violence by a cruel husband. This viewpoint about women and the fact that all they should be is in love with their husbands and families and without that they are not complete, or they have no identities is an example of emotional, personal victimization shown by media and practiced in the society.

4.4.4. Action and Adventure

In action movies or narratives, female victimization is often portrayed as a motivation for the male protagonist to go into the depth of the story. More recent movies use women as heroines of such stories, but before it was the male protagonist who always dared to take action and did a major part of the work. The “damsel in distress” was kidnapped or raped to motivate the male character to do something about it.

It is interesting to mention Yvonne Tasker’s quote from the book *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre, and the Action Cinema*⁵⁰:

“The figure of the female hero in action cinema emerges ambiguously, challenging traditional gender roles while often simultaneously reinforcing them.” (Tasker, 84)

In this quote, Tasker highlights the very complex role women play in action movies and their representation in this industry. While they are shown in these movies as strong and independent, this representation is so contradictory. Their traits are usually close to those of the male heroes, and by playing these roles they often challenge female representation in other genres. They usually are sexually attractive, which aligns with traditional stereotypes. If

⁴⁹ T. Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women*, New York, Routledge, 1982.

⁵⁰ Y. Tasker, *Spectacular Bodie: Gender, Genre, and the Action Cinema*, New York, Routledge, 1993.

they have romantic subplots, there is more chance for them to be seen and understood by the audience. Although they are considered to be heroes themselves, sometimes, and in some plots, they will be still saved by stronger male heroes. Amy Dunne and Camille Preaker are depicted as intelligent, independent women, yet their stories also involve elements that align with traditional stereotypes, like sexual manipulation, feminine fragility, and the influence of the decisions of male characters around them on their lives. For example, although Camille is strong enough to confront her mother and sister in the story, she is involved in a deep emotional bond regarding the issue and is shown to have traditional feminine fragility. Or, although Amy was smart enough to plan a disappearance so that nobody could easily discover where she was, even the police, due to her financial independence and the love she felt for her husband she decided to return home again in the end.

4.5.Cultural and Societal Impacts

One of the most important influences of media and the form of representation of female victimization in it is reinforcement of the gender stereotypes by portraying women constantly as vulnerable, in need of protection gender, and males as the heroes who are there to rescue or protect women. Such portrayals can offer a binary viewpoint to the issue of female victimization, considering women as the victims and men as the perpetrators even when the reality is different. In the case of representing sexual victimization, sensationalism has been an issue with the audience's interpretation of what happened. This sensationalism can diminish the empathy of the audience for the real victims who need to be empathized with and given the courage to come forward and narrate their stories or seek professional help. The culture of victim-blaming which is still common in many societies has been represented by movies, literature, or other forms of media. On the other hand, responsible representations have great benefits like raising awareness about the issue, helping the victims and letting them know that they are not alone, promoting empathy, and later a cultural or social change. By representing women as real-life characters and exploring the consequences these victimizations might have on women's lives, the media can have an important effect on changing the stereotypes and inequalities.

There is a theory called "victim precipitation", that was first coined by the criminologist Marvin Wolfgang, in his research on homicides in Philadelphia. It is defined as when the victim paves the way for her victimization, they could be even the first character who pushed the story into victimization. In the case of sexual assault and domestic abuse, particularly female victimization, it is believed that victims may lead the way to their

victimization through behavior, and actions as is believed by the society. From a legal point of view, if a woman's behavior is suggested to have provoked the assault, the rapist would get a lesser penalty for his actions, or even non-conviction. This is also called the victim-blaming culture, which shifts the focus from the perpetrator to the victim. It can perpetuate devastating stereotypes related to gender roles such as the belief that women provoke the attack by the way they dress or behave in society. These beliefs can have harmful effects on women's psyche and prevent them from getting help because they are scared to be judged by society and the law. Feminist scholars and activists have been critical of this theory for a long time. This theory has been believed to perpetuate patriarchal norms by justifying female victimization. Susan Brownmiller, in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* states that:⁵¹

Brownmiller underscores the problematic nature of how personal biases by some police officers can affect the legal validation of victimization. The first point of contact for a rape victim is the police and their reaction to the report of victimization is very important. If the officer believes that rape accusations are dubious or does not take real rape scenarios seriously, it might be inclined to dismiss valid claims. She also states another difference between men's and women's rights in case of rape scenarios:⁵²

She claims that rape must be regarded as a true crime, just next to robbery, or assault, because modern thinking should not have the same way of thought as before. She defines rape as an act that blows both the body and the mind of the victim and takes the pleasure of a sexual relationship from her. She believes that the difference between rape and robbery or assault is that, in rape, the devastating consequences are not as evident as in other crimes, when a robbery happens, some physical objects have been stolen that may or may not be found, however, when someone is raped, the proof is not as evident and it is a very huge case to be certainly proven and this can be one of the reasons that these cases are usually undermined or ignored. (Brownmiller, 424)

⁵¹ Despite their knowledge of the law, they are supposed to enforce, the male police mentality is often identical to the stereotypic views of rape that are shared by the rest of the male culture. The tragedy for the rape victim is that the police officer is the person who validates her victimization. A police officer who does not believe there is such a crime as rape can arrive at only one determination. (Brownmiller, 410)

⁵² "While a woman's past sexual history may be trotted out for a jury's appraisal, a man's relevant sexual history, including prior charges, and convictions for rape, may not be introduced in evidence if he does not take the witness stand. And so, a jury might see before them a sexually active woman and be told that her sexual activity reflects on her character and credibility, but the men may not be similarly examined or judged." (Brownmiller, 417)

Addressing the issue of female victimization and rape as serious crimes in society needs a multi-faceted approach that includes education, legal forms, engagement of the community, and changes in social norms. Encouraging some media coverage by the government and the public which is respectful to the victims and avoids the victim-blaming issue can help change the public's perceptions. *Gone Girl* and *Sharp Objects* both address the issue of victim-blaming. In *Gone Girl*, Amy's fabricated accusations reflect societal tendencies to doubt women's credibility, and *Sharp Objects* reflects the culture of victim-blaming and its influences on women's psychological state. There is a quote in *Gone Girl* by Amy saying:

“People love to talk. They love to express their opinions, and if something isn't black and white, they love to debate it.”

This quote reveals the public's awareness of discussing and judging victims' stories, especially in smaller communities. Similarly, in *Sharp Objects* Camille is struggling with the way her people are judging the murder victims and discussing whether they were raped by the killer or not.

4.6. Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a collection of qualities that are involved with an individual's identity, such as race, class, and sexuality. These qualities have a great influence on the way literature and film represent female victimization. The term is coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw and suggests that these various qualities which form an identity, do not exist independently from each other. The representation of female victimization is different across various racial classes. In less recent media, white women are often less marginalized than black ones, and black women are often portrayed as maids of white women. Although both white and black women are under the pressure of systematic victimization, in society and media the focus is usually on the victimization of white women, and black women's victimization is more considered as a societal norm. When literature and film fail to represent female victimization of women of color as it is, this topic can be undervalued by society or vice versa. Therefore, the media's empathy with racial groups can be so influential in changing a harmful societal norm. Bell Hooks, in her book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*⁵³, explains this issue and says that everyone in society thinks that white women have more rights and more inclinations towards working equally to men, however, they do not think that when white women started the feminist movements, black women were not socially and politically in a position to start any movements at all, they all want to work as much as the white women do,

⁵³ B. Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, Boston, South End Press, 1981.

but they have not been given the same rights in the society. Black females of the 19th century, according to Bell Hooks, were victimized a lot more than white females. They were exposed to horrible sexist discrimination and oppression, therefore, the first concern of black women at the time was racism, and before its elimination, there was no way for them to focus on other issues such as gender equality. She goes on to blame the society in America for having an apartheid social structure which forces women to focus on their race and fight for equal rights for black women rather than doing it for all women (Hooks, 216-218) She believed that:

“Black female’s clubs and organizations were potentially more feminist and radical in nature than white women’s clubs because of the difference in their circumstances created by racist oppression. White women as a group did not have to launch an attack on prostitution as did black women. Many young black women leaving the south and migrating to north were compelled to work as prostitutes.” (Hooks, 222)

As she explains, there were many challenges for black women at the time. Since their circumstances in life were so different from the white women, their feminist clubs had to also work on different topics. Also, some white feminist women who looked for gender equality still were racists, so they did not let black women participate in their social clubs and had the same concerns as them. She highlights the intersectionality between feminism, race, and class, and discusses that black women were compelled to have different clubs because their concerns were so different than the whites, also society took them less seriously than white women. Women of a lower economic situation can also have the same experience. In society and in the media, they are more prone to female victimization, however, their stories are underrepresented both by society and the media. The focus on upper-class, white female narratives can obscure the challenges faced by lower-class women. If the media emphasizes female victimization regardless of their economic situation, race, or class, it will attract the attention of the society support for all women more.

Another intersection is between sexuality and female victimization. In society, LGBTQ+ women face different challenges related to victimization, including hate crimes and discrimination. The lack of visibility for these women is seen in the media as well which can lead to more neglect by society related to their experiences. Other identity categories like age, disabilities, religion, and immigration can all be influential in the form of representation of female victimization. For example, immigrant women may face different victimizations in comparison with the female citizens of that country, and old women with disabilities may be

neglected when it comes to their victimization. Highlighting all these factors by the media and speaking more about them, may lead to a more comprehensive societal understanding. Kimberlé Crenshaw in her essay called *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour*⁵⁴, explains more about how different situations of living have impacts on the type of victimization in women. In a part of this article, she says:

“Immigrant women are vulnerable to spousal violence because so many of them depend on their husbands for information regarding their legal status. Many women who are now permanent residents continue to suffer abuse under threats of deportation by their husbands.” (Crenshaw, 11)

Therefore, if the media coverage and representation of such women becomes more, society becomes more aware and attentive to them. In this way also the media coverage can bring change to some laws and regulations that support helping to prevent female victimization of any kind.

In *Gone Girl* movie, the actress the role Amy Dunne is chosen to be Rosamund Pike, a white, blonde woman who can be shown to have the full attention of the media and public in the movie, the question is whether the movie could have the same message if the actress of protagonist has any appearance different than what the majority of the society want to have as females. The choice itself highlights how certain narratives can dominate the discourse on female victimization, often sidelining women from other racial or socioeconomic backgrounds. Amy’s ability to manipulate the media and public reflects her social privilege. In *Sharp Objects* the same issue is addressed, Camille goes back to her hometown to cover the deaths of two teenage girls who have been brutally murdered but when she starts discovering she sees that these girls and their families are being neglected by the police and the public because of their gender and social status, however, they respect her mother and care about her problems, big or small, a lot because she is the typical woman the society respects, white, rich, and controlling. In the end, it is revealed that all this time she was the murderer, but the police had not suspected her because typically such women cannot be suspected in society. There is a witness to the kidnapping of one of the girls, the little boy called James Capisi who lived in a difficult situation with her mother who suffered from

⁵⁴ K. Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour”, *Stanford Law Review*, 1991.

cancer, they reported their witness to the police, but they never took it seriously because of their social status in town.

4.7. Comparative Analysis

4.7.1. Media Forms: Film vs. Literature vs. Digital Media

Films often rely on different visual effects and techniques to convey the message of victimization to the audience, which may have more impact on the audience and their emotions. Literature delves more into the characters' thoughts and feelings, and more explanation about the experience. The series adaptation of *Sharp Objects* provides visual scenes of victimization that shock the audience whereas the novel delves more into the psychological state of the characters. Digital platforms like social media, podcasts, and blogs offer interactive communication about female victimization. Documentaries are a platform for real-life experiences and personal testimony. An example of these documentaries is "The Hunting Ground" which is about sexual assault in college campuses, the survivor's stories, the statistics, and all that is needed to provide a real-life experience show.

Carol J. Clover in *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in Modern Horror Film* says that the image of the female who is distressed in the horror genre represents not only the helplessness of the female sex but also the fact that they survive at the end because of the secret power of endurance they own. The fact that the protagonist is a female, may attract the young males' attention which is the purpose of the directors. Therefore, women are usually the objects of gaze in films, especially in horror genres. In the end, the collapse of distance between the victim and the threat, male and female, has two meanings: One is that the final girl has become masculine, but the male audience has become feminized. According to her beliefs, it is pivotal to analyze how horror genres challenge gender norms. The concept of "final girl" in horror movies, is usually the potential female victim of the story. But at the end of the story, she always survives and defeats the killer. This transformation disrupts the audience's default state of mind which tells them male characters are stronger than the female. Clover discusses how this also changes the default mindset of the audience. The fact that she says the audience will be feminized is because they are watching the film from the point of view of a female who transcends from being the victim to the heroine of the story and at the end, they identify with her as the heroine. This identification with the female character is what feminizes the male audience as she believes. This may also challenge the

way they believed the gender norms to be and what they see as it is on the screen. What Clover believed was that these genres were not only to bring excitement to the audience but also to make them think about gender roles and power dynamics in society.

The other feminist scholars who have discussed female representation in literary works are Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their work *Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*⁵⁵. In this book, they say:⁵⁶

This quote highlights the extreme ways in which women's victimization and moral qualities are depicted in literature. These are some critical tools to analyze the restrictive roles literature assigns to women, casting them in roles where their victimization underscores their moral or spiritual purity or their descent into madness or immorality.

4.7.2.Cultural Contexts: Western vs. Non-western Narratives

Western media represents female victimization within the context of individualism and personal rights, it emphasizes personal traumas and the journey towards its healing. *Gone Girl*, for example, is about the personal experiences of Amy Dunne and her challenges in her family, marriage, and society. Although there are concepts in the novel and the movie that may be common among all women, the focus is on her individuality. Non-western narratives usually are more communal, societal, and common among a group of women focusing more on different categories of women based on their identities like age, race, etc., and their experiences. For example, the novel *Women Without Men*⁵⁷ by Shahrnush Parsipur is a groundbreaking work of Iranian literature that intertwines the lives of five women in Iran who seek independence and freedom within the patriarchal society. There is very important research done on this issue by Lila Abu-Lughod, an anthropologist who is also a professor at Columbia University, in her work *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*⁵⁸. In this work, she contrasts victimhood narratives in Egypt with Western countries, and how female victimization is presented in television dramas. Many Western dramas focus

⁵⁵ S.M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Women Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1979.

⁵⁶ Female characters in literature are often portrayed not only as morally superior to men, but also as victims of seemingly insurmountable social and psychological obstacles. The angel in the house and the madwoman in the attic, metaphorical extremes of female virtue and victimization, are not just figures of speech but embodiments of the profound psychological and literary tensions inherent in women's social roles and literary representations.

⁵⁷ S. Parsipur, *Women without Men: A Novel of Modern Iran*, New York, The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2004.

⁵⁸ L. Abu-Lughod, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

on individualism and the empowerment of females to overcome victimization, however, in Egyptian dramas, the narratives and victimization emphasize community, and they contextualize female victimization in broader familial and social frames. As she believes, the representation of female victimization in every society is not to be separated from the social and political situation of that society, therefore in Egypt, the focus is more on victimization concerning colonialism, but the women's concerns in Western media are so different than that. Comparative analysis of different genres, media forms, and cultural contexts reveals the fact that female victimization's representation has various forms. Each medium has its conventions and perspectives. When it comes to the representation of female victimization, it is very important to know in which context, culture, or media type it is discussed.

4.8. Audience Reception and Interpretation

Representation of female victimization varies across audiences according to their beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences. This variation can lead to discussions, controversies, and in some cultures even censorship according to the societal attitudes towards gender dynamics. The audience's interpretation of different forms of representations of female victimization may be different according to their societal norms, personal lives, gender, age, and other identity aspects. When a film or a novel is released, some audiences may interpret it as a representation of female empowerment, while others may interpret it as harmful to social stereotypes. Some audiences show empathy for victims, while others blame them for their victimization. If it is too real, some will think of it as a real-life experience in the society they are living in, others might say it is fictional.

Critics and scholars view different forms of representation based on various lenses, like feminist theories, media criticism, and cultural studies. Their interpretation is also based on the societal implications of these portrayals. They give insights to the audience about how female victimization is represented in different cultural or historical contexts, and societal situations. By writing reviews, giving interviews, articles, or papers they might influence the public perception and interpretation of a form of representation of female victimization. When it comes to censorship, the issue becomes more sensitive because, in societies, the representation of this issue needs to be censored, it is a sign of many social issues and societal limitations related to gender roles. Women are more discriminated against, and their experiences with female victimization are more underrepresented in such societies and cultures.

In *Gone Girl* movie, some audiences may view Amy's strategy for manipulation and control as her empowerment as a woman in a small society. They might regard her actions as a critique of societal expectations in a patriarchal world. Others might interpret them as reinforcement of negative gender stereotypes, portraying women as manipulative gender. This interpretation can be harmful as it may perpetuate distrust in cases of victimization. Audiences that come from cultural backgrounds with victim-blaming might blame Amy for her victimization in marriage and life. Some others might sympathize with her and interpret her actions as the consequence of gender inequality in society.

In the *Sharp Objects* series, the audience may interpret the story as a reflection of societal neglect and psychological trauma experienced by the victims. The audience and critics who view the story from a feminist lens might praise it for its honesty and unflinching look at the impact of gender-based violence and the failure of the institutions to protect these victims. Audiences with backgrounds of sexual assault and trauma might as well praise the series for reflecting real-life experiences.

Scholars and critics play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions about a movie, piece of literature, or other kind of media representations on any topic. Through reviews, interviews, papers, articles, etc. they provide insights that can influence how the audience interprets a work on female victimization. Feminist critics are influential in interpreting how these works can challenge traditional gender roles and offer a critique of the patriarchal structure of some societies. They could argue that Flynn's works underscore the complexities of female victimization. There are lots of valuable examples but one of the most important is the one from Roxane Gay in her essay collection *Bad Feminist*⁵⁹ that she says: "Gone Girl is about the rather disturbing things women sometimes do to maintain the myth of having it all and how we all are implicated in these narratives. Amy as a character embodies the expectations placed on women to be perfect wives, perfect women, and the terrifying ways these expectations can distort one's sense of self and morality." (Gay, 2014, p.64)

The other type, media critics, might focus on the representation of female victimization in the context of sensationalism and audience engagement. One prominent media critic has discussed *Sharp Objects*, a staff writer at *The Atlantic* called Sophie Gilbert. She says:⁶⁰

⁵⁹ R. Gay, *Bad Feminist: Essays*, Harper Perennial, 2014.

⁶⁰ "Sharp Objects is not just a murder mystery or a character study, but a forensic examination of trauma and the manifold ways it can affect people. It's unflinching in its depiction of the suffering inflicted on women and girls, but it also delves into the psychological complexities behind those traumas, making the story as much about understanding pain as it is about feeling it." (Gilbert, 2018)

She acknowledges that *Sharp Objects* contains sensational elements, such as the graphic details of violence and psychological traumas. However, these depictions are not gratuitous but serve to underscore the severity and reality of trauma experienced by characters.

Scholars who view the movies from a cultural studies viewpoint examine how narratives like *Gone Girl* and *Sharp Objects* reflect societal attitudes toward gender dynamics. They explore the intersectionality of race, class, and sexuality in the representation of victimization, offering insights into how these stories engage with and critique broader social and cultural issues. Natalie Carter published her critique of *Gone Girl* in the *Journal of Popular Culture*. She said:

“Gone Girl masterfully exposes the cultural pressures that compel women to conform to idealized versions of femininity. Amy’s meticulous construction of her cool girl persona is a direct critique of the unrealistic standards imposed on women, revealing how these expectations can lead to profound personal and societal consequences.” (Carter, 2016, p.50)

Critics like these offer valuable insights into how *Gone Girl*, *Sharp Objects*, or other similar narratives critique the societal attitudes toward gender dynamics. By exploring intersectionality and cultural pressures shaping gender roles, this analysis helps deepen the understanding of the broader social and cultural implications of such stories regarding female victimization. They also give insights into the public audience and the way they view the narratives.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the female victimization theme in Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* and *Sharp Objects* by delving into Karen Horney and Betty Friedan’s feminist psychoanalytic theories. By studying feminist movements and the history of psychoanalysis, insights have been gained on how societal and familial expectations and media influences shape women’s identities. Understanding the historical feminist movements at their times, from the first to the fourth wave had been an important historical backdrop of the research. The historical background in which Flynn emerged as a feminist author is so pivotal. Her writings encapsulated the complexities of femininity in the modern world. Her female protagonists

challenge the traditional forms of womanhood exposing many contradictions in feminist discourse and revealing the nuance of modern feminist challenges.

In analyzing *Gone Girl* and *Sharp Objects*, Karen Horney's concept of "neurotic needs" was influential in studying Amy Dunne's manipulative and Camille Preaker's self-harming behaviors. Her perfectionism and controlling attitudes towards others especially her husband aligned with Horney's concept of "moving against others" as a defense mechanism in her personality. Meanwhile, Camille's disappointing search to find love and approval from others reflects Horney's neurotic need for affection and approval. Amy's constant struggle between her real self and idealized self because of her parents' book series "Amazing Amy", was justified by Horney's "tyranny of the shoulds". In "Sharp Objects", Adora, Camille's mother embodies the tyranny of the shoulds by projecting her neurotic need for power and control on her daughters, husband, and friends. Horney's views explain how Amy's rage from her husband, family, and society is due to societal expectations. On the other hand, Camille represses her feelings and emotions and her defence mechanism for coping with her mother's behavior is self-harm. Betty Friedan's insights in her book "Feminine Mystique" about the unhappiness of women with domestic roles resonated with Amy's dissatisfaction with her marriage. She embodies "the problem that has no name" and wants to disrupt the traditional gender roles. Similarly, in *Sharp Objects*, Adora's role as a controlling mother is partly because of her dissatisfaction and the same issue. Camille also suffers from the same concept because she cannot win her mother's attention and affection. Friedan's ideas about the influence of patriarchal societies on women find expression in how Amy manipulated and framed the whole society she lived in. In *Sharp Objects*, Camille's self-harm habit and relationship with men are due to her past unresolved traumas and societal expectations regarding female sexuality. Amy's psychological struggles aligned with Freud's theory of the "unconscious mind". Camille's repressed childhood traumas and her dreams lead to her self-destructive behaviors just like Freud explains in his theory of repression. Friedan and Horney's critiques of Freud's male-oriented theories have been seen in Amy and Camille's societies. Amy's manipulation and rejection of others and Camille's identity crisis are not biological derives but the results of living in a society that gives more privileges to men over women. Amy is neither a victim nor a perpetrator. Instead, she is a real portrayal of how some women choose to respond to victimization. In *Sharp Objects*, Camille embodies long-term psychological damage because she had a controlling mother and lived in a small society.

In both novels, Gillian Flynn critiques the role of media in shaping societal expectations regarding gender roles. In *Gone Girl*, the media frenzy around Amy's disappearance story turns her into a real female victim, representing the media's myth about "missing white women" and marriage. Considering Nick as the number one suspect driven by sensationalist TV shows reflects Karen Horney's theories of rejection and societal hostility. In *Sharp Objects*, media influence has been explored through Camille's journalism job. The fact that she was covering murder cases of teenage girls in a small town like Wind Gap highlights the exploitative nature of media sensationalism and its influences on the public's perceptions. In both novels, the media's exploration of female stories aligns with Friedan's critique of the "feminine mystique". She believed that the perpetuating the gender stereotypes constrains women's identities. Flynn wants to represent how media narratives manipulate the public, exacerbate female victimization, and reinforce patriarchal norms and their impacts on women's lives.

These novels can serve as lenses through which female victimization can be examined; the societal expectations related to the victimization and the impacts they leave on these women's personal experiences, identities, and lives. By considering the theoretical insights of Karen Horney, Betty Friedan, and some theories of Sigmund Freud, this thesis aims to unravel the complexities of modern feminism. Ultimately, it is important to note that Flynn's writings push readers to look beyond and beneath the surface, as she says in her interviews to look "under the rock".

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Italian Summary

1. Introduction

L'evoluzione del femminismo è stata segnata da diverse ondate significative, ognuna delle quali ha portato sfide e progressi unici. La prima ondata del femminismo, nel XIX secolo, si è concentrata sul raggiungimento dell'uguaglianza giuridica, in particolare sul diritto di voto, concesso dal Diciannovesimo Emendamento della Costituzione degli Stati Uniti nel 1920. Figure chiave come Susan B. Anthony e Mary Wollstonecraft svolsero ruoli fondamentali in questa ondata, sostenendo i diritti delle donne all'istruzione e alla partecipazione alla vita pubblica. Anthony fondò la National Woman Suffrage Association e fu determinante nel movimento per il suffragio, mentre l'opera fondamentale della Wollstonecraft, "Vindication of the Rights of Women", sosteneva la necessità di pari opportunità educative per le donne.

La seconda ondata del femminismo, innescata da "La mistica femminile" di Betty Friedan nel 1963, ha ampliato il campo d'azione a questioni come la sessualità, i diritti riproduttivi e l'uguaglianza sul posto di lavoro. Questa ondata ha visto importanti tappe legali, tra cui l'Equal Pay Act del 1963 e la decisione Roe v. Wade del 1973. Figure come Gloria Steinem, cofondatrice della rivista "Ms. Magazine", sono diventate voci di spicco a favore di riforme sociali più ampie e della parità di genere.

La terza ondata, emersa negli anni Novanta, ha criticato la seconda ondata per la sua focalizzazione sulle donne bianche della classe media e ha enfatizzato la diversità, l'intersezionalità e la positività del corpo. Pensatrici influenti come Judith Butler e Kimberle Crenshaw hanno introdotto concetti come la performatività di genere e l'intersezionalità, evidenziando le complessità dell'identità e la sovrapposizione dei sistemi di oppressione che colpiscono le donne di diverse razze e classi.

La quarta ondata del femminismo è iniziata intorno al 2010, guidata dai progressi della tecnologia e dei social media, che hanno facilitato movimenti globali come #MeToo e #TimesUp. Questa ondata continua a sostenere l'uguaglianza di genere, i diritti LGBTQ+ e la giustizia razziale, con figure di spicco come Tarana Burke ed Emma Watson che conducono campagne significative.

Gillian Flynn, scrittrice americana contemporanea, è emersa come figura importante nella letteratura femminista con i suoi thriller psicologici che esplorano le complessità della vittimizzazione femminile e le aspettative della società. Le sue opere, come "Gone Girl" e "Sharp Objects", si addentrano nell'analisi psicologica della femminilità, raffigurando le donne sia come vittime che come personaggi complessi con disturbi della personalità. La

Flynn sfida le narrazioni tradizionali della società presentando i suoi personaggi femminili come individui dalle mille sfaccettature che si destreggiano tra le pressioni della società patriarcale.

I romanzi della Flynn evidenziano come la discriminazione sociale e la rappresentazione mediatica possano portare alla vittimizzazione e alla violenza femminile. In "Gone Girl", il comportamento manipolatorio di Amy Dunne e la sua lotta con le aspettative di perfezione della società riflettono il peso psicologico del tentativo di conformarsi a standard irrealistici. Allo stesso modo, in "Sharp Objects", l'autolesionismo e i problemi psicologici di Camille Preaker sono radicati nella sua infanzia traumatica e nell'abbandono emotivo che ha vissuto.

La psicoanalisi, a partire da Sigmund Freud, è stata un importante quadro teorico per la comprensione dei ruoli di genere e delle dinamiche di potere. La teoria della mente inconscia di Freud suggerisce che i comportamenti e le esperienze sono collegati a pensieri e traumi repressi. Tuttavia, le sue teorie, come il complesso di Edipo e l'invidia del pene, sono state criticate da psicoanaliste femministe come Karen Horney per la loro centralità maschile. Horney ha sottolineato l'importanza dei fattori culturali e sociali nei disturbi psicologici, sostenendo che i ruoli di genere tradizionali portano a comportamenti nevrotici.

Horney ha introdotto il concetto di "sé idealizzato", in cui gli individui creano una versione ideale di se stessi basata sugli standard della società, che porta a un conflitto con il loro vero sé. Questa teoria può essere applicata ad Amy Dunne in "Gone Girl", le cui azioni riflettono la sua lotta con la disparità tra il suo sé reale e quello idealizzato. L'idea di Horney dell'"ansia di base", un sentimento di impotenza derivante da esperienze infantili, può spiegare anche la personalità di Camille Preaker in "Sharp Objects". L'autolesionismo e i problemi psicologici di Camille derivano dall'abbandono emotivo che ha dovuto affrontare, con conseguenti sentimenti di insicurezza e indegnità.

Betty Friedan, un'importante scrittrice femminista, ha sfidato le norme della società con il suo libro "La mistica femminile", che ha messo in evidenza l'insoddisfazione di molte donne confinate nei ruoli domestici. Friedan introdusse il concetto di "problema che non ha nome", descrivendo il vuoto che le donne sentivano a causa dei desideri insoddisfatti e delle aspettative della società. La sua critica alle

teorie di Freud sostiene che l'insoddisfazione delle donne deriva dalle pressioni della società piuttosto che dal determinismo biologico.

Le opere di Flynn sono una critica al modo in cui le misure sociali di realizzazione, in particolare quelle legate al materialismo e alla convalida esterna, mettono in ombra i risultati personali delle donne. Esplorando il profondo impatto psicologico di queste norme sociali, Flynn invita a rivalutare il successo e la realizzazione, sostenendo il riconoscimento delle identità e dei risultati individuali delle donne. Attraverso l'esame critico della letteratura contemporanea, le femministe possono affrontare il tema del vittimismo e invitare i lettori a riconsiderare il loro pensiero sui ruoli di genere e sulle aspettative della società.

2. *Gone Girl*

"Gone Girl" di Gillian Flynn, pubblicato nel 2012, è un romanzo rivoluzionario che esplora la complessità del matrimonio e del femminismo attraverso la lente dei media e delle aspettative della società. Ambientata a North Carthage, nel Missouri, la storia inizia con la misteriosa scomparsa di Amy Elliott Dunne, che attira l'attenzione dell'opinione pubblica, dei media e delle forze dell'ordine e mette in luce il marito, Nick, come principale sospettato. Le narrazioni alternate tra Amy e Nick rivelano le loro prospettive inaffidabili e mettono in luce i temi della vittimizzazione femminile, delle pressioni della società e dell'impatto dei media sulla vita delle donne. Amy, la protagonista, incarna sia la vittima che il carnefice, mostrando la natura sfaccettata della vittimizzazione femminile. La descrizione iniziale di Amy da parte di Nick si concentra sul suo carattere complesso, simboleggiando l'intricata personalità che presenta al mondo.

Inizialmente Amy appare come la quintessenza della vittima, sottoposta a un'immensa pressione da parte dei genitori ed emarginata nel suo matrimonio. Tuttavia, nel corso della narrazione, emerge la natura manipolatrice di Amy. Finge la sua scomparsa, incastra Nick e usa le sue false annotazioni sul diario per ritrarlo come un cattivo. Il personaggio di Amy, modellato come "donna bianca scomparsa", incarna il vittimismo sociale e coniugale. Critica il costrutto sociale della "ragazza cool", un personaggio che le donne adottano per allinearsi alle aspettative della società, sacrificando il loro vero io per l'approvazione maschile. Ciò si allinea alla "mistica femminile" di Betty Friedan, che critica l'immagine delle donne come semplici estensioni degli uomini, prive di una propria identità.

Anche Margo, la sorella di Nick, sperimenta la vittimizzazione attraverso le pressioni della società e la sua relazione intima con Nick, che diventa il principale sospettato per la scomparsa di Amy. L'identità mascolinizzata di Margo, che lavora in un bar e adotta un carattere da maschiaccio, riflette la sua lotta con le aspettative di genere. Cresciuta in una famiglia misogina, i meccanismi di difesa di Margo derivano dall'atteggiamento sprezzante del padre nei confronti delle sue emozioni, che la porta a essere riluttante a sposarsi o ad avere una famiglia.

Le teorie di Karen Horney sulle nevrosi, in particolare il bisogno di potere e di controllo, sono esemplificate nel personaggio di Amy. I bisogni nevrotici di Amy si manifestano attraverso comportamenti manipolatori volti a mantenere un'immagine di perfezione e a controllare coloro che la circondano. Le annotazioni sul suo diario servono come strumenti di manipolazione, ritraendola come una vittima ed esercitando al contempo un controllo su Nick. La ricerca nevrotica del potere di Amy deriva dalle sue ansie e insicurezze profonde, modellate dalle pressioni della società e dalla versione idealizzata dei suoi genitori, "Amazing Amy". Questa immagine idealizzata di sé crea un conflitto interno significativo, che porta a comportamenti manipolatori e aggressivi.

Le azioni di Amy riflettono il concetto di Horney di "tirannia dei doveri", in cui gli individui stabiliscono standard irrealistici per se stessi, portando all'ansia e a comportamenti distruttivi quando questi standard non vengono rispettati. L'incapacità di Amy di conciliare il suo vero io con la sua immagine idealizzata si traduce in una lotta costante per la convalida, che si manifesta nelle sue azioni estreme contro Nick. La teoria dell'"Io ideale" di Sigmund Freud e i concetti di "vero sé" e "falso sé" di Donald Winnicott illuminano ulteriormente la crisi d'identità di Amy. La sua incapacità di accettare il suo vero sé porta a comportamenti manipolatori, che riflettono la sua lotta con le aspettative della società e l'identità personale.

I comportamenti di Amy possono essere interpretati come manifestazioni di repressione e proiezione. Amy reprime la sua ostilità verso i genitori, la società e Nick, proiettando la sua ansia sugli altri attraverso azioni manipolative. Inquadrando Nick, Amy proietta la sua rabbia repressa, mantenendo la sua perfetta immagine di sé. Questa proiezione è una necessità psicologica per Amy, che non riesce a conciliare consapevolmente i suoi veri sentimenti con il suo personaggio sociale.

Il concetto di "problema che non ha nome", espresso da Betty Friedan in "Feminine Mystique", descrive l'insoddisfazione delle donne per il fatto di essere confinate in ruoli domestici. Il personaggio di Amy incarna questo problema, apparendo inizialmente felice nel suo matrimonio ma rivelando in seguito una profonda insoddisfazione per il suo ruolo di casalinga. I conflitti interni di Amy e i commenti sui ruoli matrimoniali evidenziano le pressioni sociali che le donne devono affrontare per conformarsi ai ruoli tradizionali. La sua risposta estrema a queste pressioni, incastrando Nick per il suo omicidio, simboleggia la rabbia e la frustrazione che molte donne provano a causa delle aspettative della società.

Il ruolo dei media in "Gone Girl" è cruciale nel plasmare la percezione pubblica e nel rafforzare le norme sociali. Il romanzo critica il sensazionalismo dei media e il suo impatto sulle vite individuali, in particolare nei casi di crimini che coinvolgono le donne. I media perpetuano gli stereotipi della donna come passiva, vulnerabile e bisognosa di protezione maschile, normalizzando la violenza di genere e mettendo in ombra le conquiste delle donne. Il monologo della "Cool Girl" nel romanzo critica il modo in cui i media ritraggono le donne per allinearle alle fantasie maschili, spingendole a conformarsi a standard irrealistici.

La copertura sensazionale dei media sulla scomparsa di Amy riflette la riluttanza della società a considerare le donne come colpevoli, rafforzando gli stereotipi secondo cui le donne possono essere solo vittime. La manipolazione di Amy da parte dei media mostra il potere del sensazionalismo nel formare l'opinione pubblica. Le rappresentazioni positive dei media possono aumentare la consapevolezza della vittimizzazione femminile, ma quelle negative possono perpetuare atteggiamenti dannosi, scoraggiando le vere vittime dal cercare aiuto.

I social media introducono nuove forme di vittimizzazione, come il cyberbullismo, con effetti devastanti sulla salute mentale delle donne. "Gone Girl" evidenzia l'impatto della manipolazione mediatica, sottolineando la necessità di un'alfabetizzazione mediatica per valutare criticamente le rappresentazioni della vittimizzazione femminile. Il romanzo incoraggia i lettori a mettere in discussione le narrazioni dei media e a sviluppare un approccio discernente al loro consumo, contrastando i dannosi stereotipi di genere.

In sintesi, "Gone Girl" di Gillian Flynn esplora la vittimizzazione femminile attraverso personaggi complessi e critiche alla società, sottolineando l'interazione tra psicologia individuale, aspettative della società e influenza dei media. Il romanzo funge da esame critico

dei ruoli di genere e delle pressioni che le donne subiscono per conformarsi, sollecitando una rivalutazione delle norme sociali e delle rappresentazioni mediatiche.

3. *Sharp Objects*

"Sharp Objects" di Gillian Flynn, pubblicato nel 2006, esplora magistralmente i traumi psicologici e il loro impatto sulla salute mentale e sull'identità dei personaggi femminili. La storia segue Camille Preaker, una giornalista che torna nella sua piccola città natale di Wind Gap, nel Missouri, per raccontare gli omicidi seriali di due adolescenti. Questo ritorno costringe Camille a confrontarsi con il suo passato travagliato, tra cui la rottura del rapporto con la madre Adora e la perdita della sorella Marian. Il romanzo si addentra nei ricordi traumatici di Camille, nei segreti familiari e nelle pressioni della società, evidenziando i temi della vittimizzazione femminile, dei disturbi mentali e della crisi d'identità.

Il viaggio di Camille è segnato da autolesionismo, traumi e ricerca di autorealizzazione. I suoi monologhi interiori e i suoi comportamenti distruttivi rivelano un dolore psicologico profondo e una crisi di identità esacerbata dalle aspettative della società e dai problemi familiari. Il ritorno a Wind Gap scatena i suoi ricordi e i suoi traumi, in particolare il rapporto tossico con la madre Adora. Il corpo di Camille, coperto di cicatrici autoinflitte, simboleggia i suoi conflitti interni e i tentativi di ottenere il controllo sul suo dolore.

Le prime esperienze di Camille con la sessualità femminile sono state violente e hanno influenzato la sua percezione della sessualità e del suo posto nella società. Le teorie di Karen Horney sull'ansia di base spiegano i sentimenti di impotenza e insignificanza di Camille derivanti da queste esperienze traumatiche. La stessa Wind Gap, con la sua società patriarcale e giudicante, aggrava le difficoltà di Camille. La critica di Betty Friedan alla discriminazione di genere e alle aspettative della società in "La mistica femminile" si riflette nelle esperienze di Camille, mostrando come i pregiudizi della società sminuiscano il valore delle donne e contribuiscano alle crisi di identità.

I meccanismi di coping di Camille, compreso l'autolesionismo, sono tentativi di comunicare le sue forti emozioni e di dissociarsi dai ricordi traumatici. La sua percezione di sé è fortemente influenzata dalle pressioni della società, il che porta a un conflitto interno tra il suo vero io e le aspettative sociali che le vengono imposte. L'abitudine di Camille a bere e le interazioni con la sua città natale riflettono la sua lotta con l'ansia di base e la mancanza di sicurezza e protezione nel suo ambiente.

Adora, la madre di Camille, soffre di Munchausen by Proxy (MBP), una malattia mentale in cui chi si prende cura dei figli inventa o induce malattie per ottenere attenzione e simpatia. Il comportamento di Adora è influenzato dal rapporto traumatico con la madre violenta, Joya. Questo trauma generazionale si manifesta nell'amore condizionato e nella manipolazione delle figlie da parte di Adora. Il matrimonio di Adora con Alan, caratterizzato dall'indifferenza, influenza ulteriormente il suo comportamento tossico.

L'attenzione e l'affetto di Adora dipendono dallo stato di salute delle figlie, il che porta alla morte della sorella di Camille, Marian, e alla vittimizzazione di Camille e Amma. La dottoressa Emily Andrews spiega che la MBP deriva da un disagio psicologico e da traumi irrisolti, con fattori sociali come le aspettative di accudimento materno che giocano un ruolo significativo. L'amore condizionato e la manipolazione di Adora creano un ambiente tossico che incide profondamente sulla salute mentale e sull'identità di Camille.

Amma, la sorellastra di Camille, presenta una dicotomia di innocenza e ostilità. Vive una doppia vita, rappresentando una bambina innocente per Adora e mostrando al contempo comportamenti nevrotici e manipolatori. La teoria dei bisogni nevrotici di Karen Horney spiega il costante bisogno di Amma di affetto e rassicurazione, che porta alle sue azioni di manipolazione. La doppia vita di Amma crea un divario tra il suo sé reale e quello idealizzato, portandola alla nevrosi.

Il comportamento nevrotico di Amma è evidente nelle sue interazioni con gli amici, nel suo bisogno ossessivo di affetto da parte di Adora e nei suoi ultimi atti di violenza. La casa delle bambole che Amma crea, una replica della loro casa reale, simboleggia i segreti nascosti e l'atmosfera tossica all'interno della famiglia. La scoperta di denti umani nella casa delle bambole rivela il ruolo di Amma negli omicidi delle ragazze, guidato dal suo bisogno nevrotico di controllo e affetto.

4. Representation of female victimization in media

Storicamente, i personaggi femminili nei media sono stati spesso rappresentati come innocenti e dipendenti, riflettendo i valori sociali che enfatizzavano la purezza e la vulnerabilità. Queste rappresentazioni erano prevalenti nella letteratura delle origini e nei film muti, dove le donne erano comunemente viste come "donzelle in pericolo" che si affidavano agli uomini per risolvere i loro problemi. Personaggi come Ofelia nell'"Amleto" di

Shakespeare incarnano questo archetipo. Questa idealizzazione culturale spingeva le donne a conformarsi a questi tratti, misurando il loro valore in base alla loro dipendenza dagli uomini.

Tra la fine del XIX e l'inizio del XX secolo, l'emergere dei movimenti femministi ha iniziato a mettere in discussione queste narrazioni. I personaggi femminili iniziarono a evolversi, diventando più autonomi e meno dipendenti dal soccorso maschile. Questo cambiamento rifletteva i più ampi mutamenti della società, con la ricerca di una maggiore indipendenza e uguaglianza da parte delle donne.

Le teorie femministe hanno svolto un ruolo cruciale nel rimodellare le narrazioni dei media. Karen Horney ha criticato la rappresentazione delle donne come biologicamente predisposte alla vittimizzazione, sostenendo che le aspettative della società favoriscono i comportamenti nevrotici. In "Gone Girl" e "Sharp Objects", i personaggi femminili lottano contro le pressioni della società e i disturbi psicologici, riflettendo il punto di vista della Horney sull'impatto delle aspettative della società sulla salute mentale delle donne.

La critica di Betty Friedan ai ruoli di genere in "La mistica femminile" ha evidenziato come i media perpetuino gli stereotipi che confinano le donne nei ruoli domestici. Questa critica ha influenzato i media a rappresentare le donne come indipendenti e capaci, sfidando le norme di genere tradizionali.

The male Gaze: Il concetto di "The Male Gaze" di Laura Mulvey suggerisce che i film spesso si rivolgono agli spettatori maschi oggettivando le donne. Questa prospettiva può sminuire il ruolo della donna a mero oggetto di piacere visivo, come si vede in film come "Gone Girl", dove il personaggio di Amy è inizialmente presentato attraverso una lente glamour e oggettivata.

The Final Girl: La teoria della "Final Girl" di Carol J. Clover descrive l'unica donna sopravvissuta nei film horror che affronta l'antagonista. Questo tropo sfida i tradizionali ruoli di genere ritraendo le donne come resistenti e capaci di superare avversità estreme. Amy Dunne in "Gone Girl" incarna una versione sovversiva della ragazza finale, usando la manipolazione per sopravvivere.

Il test di Bechdel: introdotto da Alison Bechdel, questo test valuta se un film presenta almeno due donne che parlano tra loro di qualcosa di diverso dagli uomini. "Sharp Objects"

supera questo test, con più personaggi femminili che discutono dei loro traumi e dei problemi della società.

Dramma: I drammi spesso esplorano gli aspetti psicologici e sociali della vittimizzazione femminile, suscitando empatia e comprensione. In "Gone Girl", la manipolazione di Amy e l'insoddisfazione per il suo matrimonio riflettono pressioni sociali profonde.

Horror: I film horror utilizzano il tropo della "ragazza finale" per rappresentare la resistenza delle donne di fronte alla violenza estrema. Sebbene "Gone Girl" e "Sharp Objects" non siano horror tradizionali, utilizzano temi simili di sopravvivenza e trauma psicologico.

Romanticismo: Le narrazioni romantiche hanno storicamente banalizzato la vittimizzazione femminile ritraendo le donne come dipendenti dal soccorso maschile. Le storie d'amore moderne, invece, ritraggono le donne come potenti e indipendenti.

Azione e avventura: Nei film d'azione, la vittimizzazione delle donne serve spesso come motivazione per i protagonisti maschili. I film più recenti hanno iniziato a presentare eroi femminili forti, anche se questi personaggi a volte rafforzano gli stereotipi tradizionali.

Le rappresentazioni mediatiche della vittimizzazione femminile rafforzano gli stereotipi di genere, dipingendo le donne come vulnerabili e bisognose di protezione maschile. Ciò perpetua norme sociali dannose e culture di colpevolizzazione delle vittime. Tuttavia, una rappresentazione responsabile può aumentare la consapevolezza, promuovere l'empatia e guidare il cambiamento della società.

Intersezionalità: Il concetto di intersezionalità di Kimberlé Crenshaw sottolinea come i vari aspetti dell'identità, come razza, classe e sessualità, si intersecano per influenzare le esperienze di vittimizzazione. I media spesso si concentrano sulla vittimizzazione delle donne bianche, mettendo in secondo piano le esperienze delle donne di colore e di quelle provenienti da contesti socioeconomici più bassi.

Le interpretazioni del pubblico delle rappresentazioni mediatiche variano in base al background culturale, alle esperienze personali e alle norme sociali. Gli studiosi e i critici svolgono un ruolo fondamentale nel plasmare le percezioni del pubblico, offrendo intuizioni e critiche che influenzano la comprensione delle narrazioni.

